

THE MAGAZINE OF THE MAGEN AVOT COMMUNITY



HAMAGEN

#11

ROSH HASHANAH 2025/5786

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ROSH HASHANAH 2025/5786

The cover features a photograph of two individuals from behind, embracing each other. The person on the left has dark curly hair and wears a white t-shirt. The person on the right wears a white head covering and a patterned garment. The background is bright and slightly blurred.

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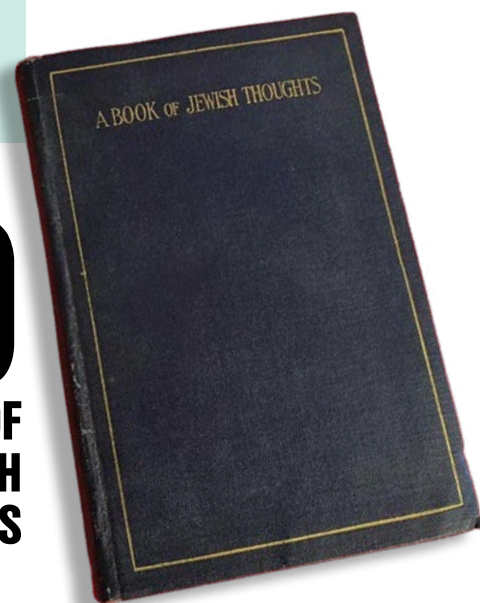
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שָׁנָה טוֹבָה וּמוֹתָצָה

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A BOOK OF JEWISH THOUGHTS





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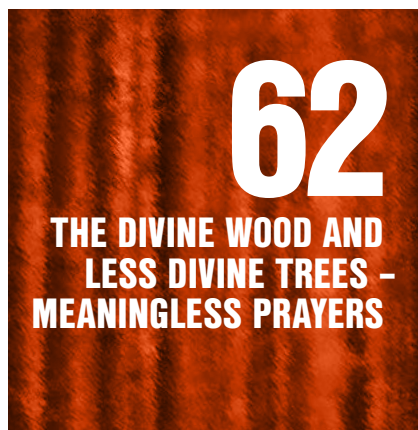
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THE DIVINE WOOD AND LESS DIVINE TREES – MEANINGLESS PRAYERS



Magen Avot

From the Desk of the Editor Julian Pollard

In the 1970s Millwall football fans used to famously boast *"Everyone hates us and we don't care!"* It might be superficially attractive for Jews to engage with this mindset in today's Britain, but I think I'd prefer to adopt the positive approach of Ian Dury and the Blockheads who sang instead about: *"Reasons to be cheerful."* Indeed that is the theme of this edition of HaMagen, despite the rise in antisemitism and challenges the Jews in the UK face.

We have much to be proud of as evidenced by the story of one of our own first responders (Emma Taylor-Levy), our amazing Chatanim (Daniel Greenberg CB and Rafi Kleiman) both of whom are profiled here, our 10 year Anniversary celebrations, the inspirational story of the Vecht family, the involvement of the Wolfes in the welcome and integration of new immigrants to Israel. Also, there are words of inspiration from Rabbi Golker and Rabbi Steven Gaffin, the poetry of Eve Grubin-Brookes, profiles of our new Chairman Jonthan Faith and his wife Sharon, the major contribution Jews made to shortening World War II at Bletchley Park and the need for calmness and relaxation in a challenging world (Harriet Morris-Sloane). We continue to promote chessed in all its elements.

As a kehilla, we are preparing to join the wider UK Jewish community to celebrate the **Jewish Culture Month** in June 2026 where we will showcase our contribution to wider society in terms of culture, music, politics, medicine, the law, scientific research, literature – more reasons to be cheerful.

I am, as always, indebted to our contributors - without whom this would be a very slim edition! Thanks also to our advertisers and the Editorial Team for their dedicated and meticulous work. New members are welcome to our team so please contact me.

Shanah tova
Julian Pollard
Editor

HAMAGEN

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With thanks to all our contributors

Please Note: All content has been checked and approved for publication by Rabbi Yoni Golker.

The opinions expressed here are the personal views of the authors and do not necessarily represent that of the Shul.

A ROSH HASHANAH MESSAGE FROM CHIEF RABBI SIR EPHRAIM MIRVIS KBE

A few months ago, while recording some podcasts in Israel, I interviewed hostage campaigner Dalia Horn. Her family's pain is unimaginable: her brothers-in-law, Yair and Eitan, were both taken hostage by Hamas on October 7th. Yair, who was released after nearly five hundred days of unspeakable torture, shared a story with Dalia which she recalled during our conversation.

At one point during their captivity, the two brothers were forced to run for their lives through a tunnel deep beneath Gaza. Eitan collapsed. Broken and exhausted, he begged his brother to leave him behind. But Yair refused. He bent down and lifted him up, with two Hebrew words: "Achim anachnu" – "We are brothers".

After his release, Yair asked Dalia, "Who will be there to lift Eitan now, when I no longer can?"

Dalia's answer became her mission, and her message to the Jewish world: We are all brothers and sisters. And it is our responsibility to lift one another.

On the second day of Rosh Hashanah, we read the story of the Akeidah – the binding of Isaac. In its aftermath, Hashem famously blesses Abraham: "I shall significantly increase the number of your offspring so they will be like the stars in the heavens above and like the sand which is by the seashore."

The Midrash asks: why both stars and sand? Both seem to symbolise incalculability – so what is the difference?

The answer is that stars are high, untouchable and secure. They represent the Jewish people in times of safety and strength. But sand is trampled underfoot. It symbolises us in our moments of danger, pain and vulnerability. And yet, this is part of a blessing. How so?

Because the reference here is not merely to "sand". It is "sand by the

“ We have felt the loneliness of facing down hatred, and the weight of grief and fear. And yet, like the sand on the shore, we have held firm, bound together by a heritage that is ancient, unshakable and sacred.

seashore". Wet, compact and pressed tightly together by the tide, the individual grains are bound together as one.

This was Hashem's deeper blessing: that even when we are under assault, when we feel trampled or cast aside, we will not scatter. We will draw together. We will hold each other up.

As we mark two years since the atrocities of October 7th – atrocities that have left deep scars across the Jewish world – we can reflect with pride not only on our survival, but on the way that we have stood together. We have felt the loneliness of facing down hatred, and the weight of grief and fear. And yet, like the sand on the shore, we have held firm, bound together by a heritage that is ancient, unshakable and sacred.

Achim anachnu: We are brothers. We



are sisters. And we do not let one another fall.

As I write these words, Eitan Horn remains in Gaza. He is one of fifty whose families still await their return. May this Rosh Hashanah bring healing, strength and redemption. For our hostages, for our homeland, for every Jewish soul still waiting to be lifted and for everyone whose lives have been shattered during these exceptionally challenging times.

Shanah Tovah! ■



Office of The
CHIEF RABBI

A ROSH HASHANAH MESSAGE FROM PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED SYNAGOGUE SAUL TAYLOR

The 2021 film “Operation Mincemeat” tells the story of Lieutenant Commander Ewen Montagu, who, during the Second World War, came up with the idea of dressing a corpse in British army officer uniform. The corpse was planted with fake papers showing plans for an Allied invasion of Greece, when the real target was Sicily.

The body was planted to wash ashore in Spain where the papers would be found by the Nazis. The Germans were completely fooled. The details in the fake papers made their way to Hitler’s office, Third Reich troops were diverted to Greece and the Allied invasion of Sicily was a success.

What you might not know is that after the war, Ewen Montagu became President of the United Synagogue, and my grandpa was the Minister at Dollis Hill United Synagogue at the time.

You might also not know that the 2021 movie with Colin Firth is the second film version of this story. The original was a BAFTA-winning film called “The Man Who Never Was,” and was released in 1956.

The film concludes with the real Ewen Montagu placing his OBE on the grave in Spain of the man who never was. My father told me he watched the film as a child on his parents’ black and white TV. When the real Ewen Montagu came on screen, my grandma said to my father: “Look, that’s your Daddy’s boss!”

My father would later become a vice president of the United Synagogue. I am deeply aware of the weight of this office and the quality of leaders who have come before me and in particular,

my predecessor, Michael Goldstein. Michael is an example of how communal leadership should be done, and it was an honour to serve under him.

Rosh Hashanah affords us all the chance to take stock of the past year and reflect on how we can be better people and improve our relationship with God. On Rosh Hashanah we say Avinu Malkeinu in which we ask for God’s help in this endeavour: “Our Father, our King, bring us back to You in wholehearted repentance.”

This is also an opportunity for self-reflection at the United Synagogue: together with the new Trustee Board, we have already started analysing how we can better engage our members and the wider community. Over the coming years we will, please God, ensure the United



Synagogue remains the home for all our families for future generations.

Wishing you and your families a shana tova u’metuka, a happy, healthy and sweet new year. ■

“ Rosh Hashanah affords us all the chance to take stock of the past year and reflect on how we can be better people and improve our relationship with God.”



A ROSH HASHANAH MESSAGE FROM RABBI YONI & REBBETZEN DINA GOLKER

FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT: ENTERING 5786 TOGETHER

As we approach Rosh Hashanah and the dawn of 5786, the echoes of the shofar call us not only to reflect, but to hope, to dream, and to recommit ourselves to Hashem and to one another.

This past year, 5785, has been a year of contrasts so sharp that they take our breath away. We rejoiced with all of Am Yisrael when our two adopted hostages, Agam Berger and Naama Levy, were freed and returned home. Their release was a living testament to the words of Tehillim, “Ha’zore’im b’dimah b’rinah yiktzoru” – those who sow in tears will reap in joy. Week after week, we poured out our hearts in prayer and hope for Agam and Naama and all the hostages. Their release was truly a moment we will all treasure.

Yet, even in our joy, we carry the weight of sorrow for those still in captivity. In their place, we have now adopted two further hostages – Alon Ohel (Alon ben Idit) and Avinatan Or (Avinatan ben Ditzza) – together with the countless others still held in the darkness of Hamas’s tunnels. Each name is more than a headline; it is a whole world. We carry them in our hearts, mention them in our tefillot, and keep them on our lips, especially this Yamim Neroim.

We enter 5786 with unshakeable bitachon that this will be the year of their release – the year that all our hostages come home, that our soldiers return from

the battlefield in peace, and that Am Yisrael can begin to heal from the wounds of this long and bitter war.

Malchiyos: Two Visions of Redemption

Rosh Hashanah is crowned by three central themes in Musaf: Malchiyos, Zichronos, and Shofaros. The Mishnah (Rosh Hashanah 32a) records a fascinating machlokes between Rabbi Yochanan ben Nuri and Rabbi Akiva about where the pesukim of Malchiyos belong in the Amidah. At first, it seems like a technical question – but Rav Soloveitchik taught that it reveals two profoundly different visions of how the world will one day recognise Hashem’s sovereignty.

Rabbi Yochanan ben Nuri’s introduction to Malchiyos is U’vechein tein pachdecha – a call for the bi’ur ha’ra, the destruction of evil. In his view, Hashem’s kingship will be fully realised only when He eliminates wickedness from the earth: “Kol ha’rish’a k’ashan tichleh.” Only when evil is purged can the world truly see and accept Hashem’s dominion.

Rabbi Akiva, by contrast, opens with “Al kein nekaveh lecha” – a plea for tikkun ha’ra, the transformation of evil. His hope is that humanity will come to its senses, abandon falsehood and idolatry, and willingly turn to Hashem. In this vision, the recognition of the King comes not through His might in war, but through



the nations choosing to embrace truth.

Both visions are embedded in our Machzor, and both are true. Sometimes the world needs to see Hashem izuz v’gibor, Hashem gibor milchama – the mighty Warrior Who crushes evil. And sometimes it can merit to greet Hashem Tzevakos – the radiant King Whose glory we willingly acknowledge.

Tehillim 24, which we recite on the Yamim Nora’im, captures this duality. Twice it calls, “Se’u she’arim rosheichem” – lift up your heads, you gates – but with a subtle difference. In the first, the gates passively “lift themselves” as Hashem enters in might, conquering resistance. In the second, the gates are actively opened

– a welcome, not a forced entry. One is R. Yochanan ben Nuri's vision; the other, R. Akiva's.

October 7 and Our Times

The events of October 7th, 2023, and their aftermath, have brought this teaching into sharp relief. We have seen the absolute necessity of confronting evil – of eradicating threats to Am Yisrael's safety. This is the bi'ur ha'ra of R. Yochanan ben Nuri.

But we have also witnessed moments of extraordinary achdus within Am Yisrael, and even among the nations, a renewed recognition of our people's courage, morality and resilience. Some hearts have been moved not by fear, but by inspiration. That is R. Akiva's tikkun ha'ra – the vision of a world choosing to recognise Hashem's sovereignty.

In these days of teshuva, we are called to embody both approaches: to stand firm in eradicating evil where it threatens, and to model a life so suffused with Torah, kindness and integrity that the world is drawn closer to Hashem through us.

A Community Looking Forward

At Magen Avot, we enter 5786 with resolve and optimism. This will be a year of

“May the coming year see the safe return of Alon ben Idit, Avinatan ben Ditzza, and all our hostages.”

deepening our Torah learning, strengthening our tefillah, and increasing our acts of chessed. It will also be a year of celebration, as we mark our 10th anniversary – a decade of building a kehillah that truly lives up to its name: a shield for our people, a home for Avot's mesorah, and a light in our community.

The Yamim Nora'im remind us that Hashem's Malchus is both cosmic and personal. He rules the world, but He also rules our hearts. Just as we long for a global recognition of Hashem – whether through the downfall of evil or the awakening of good – we also strive to open the gates

of our own lives willingly, joyfully, to His presence.

May the coming year see the safe return of Alon ben Idit, Avinatan ben Ditzza, and all our hostages. May Hashem protect our soldiers, heal our wounded, comfort our mourners, and bless Medinat Yisrael with lasting security.

May we merit a year in which evil is confronted and defeated, and in which more and more people – beginning with ourselves – choose to open the gates to Hashem willingly, joyfully and fully.

From our family to yours: Shana Tova U'metuka. May the King of Kings reign over us in peace, in blessing, and in joy – and may 5786 be the year we see od Avinu chai, the living fulfilment of our deepest hopes. ■



Magen Avot



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Talia, Amy's mum



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A ROSH HASHANAH MESSAGE FROM OUR CHAIRMAN JONATHAN FAITH

It is both a privilege and a pleasure to take on the role of Chairman of our wonderful shul. Having been one of its founders just over 10 years ago, it has been remarkable to see how our community has grown and evolved. I stepped away for a couple of years, but rejoining recently has reminded me why this place is so special – not just because of our shared observance and traditions, but because of the warmth, dedication and sheer brilliance of the people here. In fact, with so many eminent professionals, professors and leaders among us, I sometimes feel like the least accomplished person in the room!

Before I go any further, I want to express my heartfelt thanks to our outgoing chairman, Simon Bentley, and his wife, Esther. Simon has been a steady hand and a wise leader, guiding the community with patience, dedication, and genuine care for everyone's wellbeing. Esther's support and involvement have been equally invaluable, often working quietly behind the scenes to make sure everything ran smoothly. Simon's conscientious approach will be a hard act to follow – and I suspect he was far more disciplined than I'm likely to be – but his example will certainly inspire me as I step into this role.

What sets us apart within the United Synagogue is that we are, in many ways, the reverse of the norm in that due to universal Shabbat observance we focus our activities on Shabbat and festivals. This gives us a uniquely strong core, but also presents a challenge – we must ensure that the next generation is just as engaged and committed.

It's been said that a thriving children's programme is the heartbeat of any vibrant community. For me, one of the biggest priorities is attracting younger families, particularly with young children. My vision is to reach the point where we

can offer separate services for two age groups rather than one. This is not just about numbers – it is about building the foundations for our future.

We are blessed with an exceptional group of volunteers who have worked tirelessly, in some cases for the full 10 years since our founding. But sustaining a community is a shared responsibility. If you've been thinking about getting more involved – whether that's helping with events, supporting youth activities, welcoming new families or simply bringing friends along – we'd love you to join in.

I look forward to working with our rabbi, Rabbi Yoni Golker, and his wife, Dina, who are both incredibly friendly and welcoming; our dedicated lay leadership; and all of you to ensure our shul continues to thrive spiritually, socially and financially. Like many communities, we face financial realities that require careful planning, but I believe that with a combination of fresh energy, broader participation, and a shared commitment to our future, we can achieve our goals and more.

I know I'll be drawing on the experience of many in our community as we move forward – and I may even call on Simon's wisdom now and again, though I suspect he's earned a well-deserved rest from shul business! Most importantly, I want our shul to remain the warm, welcoming place it has always been – a community where everyone feels valued, where every child feels at home, and where we continue to support each other through all stages of life.

Thank you for placing your trust in me. I am excited about what we can achieve together and look forward to sharing the journey ahead.

Sharon joins me in wishing each and every member of Magen Avot a "Shana Tova Umetuka." ■



“Thank you for placing your trust in me. I am excited about what we can achieve together and look forward to sharing the journey ahead.”



Magen Avot

A ROSH HASHANAH MESSAGE

BoD PRESIDENT PHIL ROSENBERG



Our community has continued to face challenges and anxiety. We have seen a sickening rise in antisemitism after the attacks of 7th October 2023 and it has now been nearly two years that Jews have been subjected to increased levels of hate on our streets, online and in civil society.

Despite these challenges, I have seen extraordinary strength. From Manchester to Glasgow, Cardiff to London, I have spent time with proud and flourishing Jewish communities. We – the Jewish people – have resilience in our DNA.

Since my election as Board of Deputies President last year, we have identified five priorities for building a brighter future for our community and we have significant achievements in each area:

Fighting antisemitism

The Commission on Antisemitism – backed by the Prime Minister – is a review of anti-Jewish discrimination across public and professional life co-chaired by political heavyweights Lord John Mann and Dame Penny Mordaunt. They have produced a powerful report filled with practical recommendations. Our advocacy has led to a change in the law which will push protests away from our synagogues.

Standing up for peace and security in Israel and the Middle East

We have been campaigning tirelessly for the hostages, with weekly vigils in Westminster and Edinburgh, our Adopt a Hostage scheme, and campaigns at Sukkot, Chanukah and Pesach. We

are working constantly to ensure our community's hopes for lasting peace and security for Israelis, Palestinians and the wider Middle East are heard by governments in the UK, Israel, the US, Arab states, and beyond.

Defending our religious freedoms

We are constantly working to ensure our religious freedoms are protected. Our revised Employer's Guide to Judaism is helping Jews in the workplace and we are working with other faith communities to have Judaism classified by government as an ethnicity as well as a religion, which will help ensure the protection of Jewish rights in all fields.

Making our community more united, inclusive, and outward-looking

Within weeks of my election, I launched with Muslim communities the Optimistic Alliance to tackle anti-Jewish and anti-Muslim hatred; challenge extremism; support mainstream voices; and to defend shared religious freedoms.

Celebrating our faith, heritage, and culture as British Jews

Next year we will have our first British Jewish Culture Month – an uplifting celebration of our history, arts, and contributions to society. It's an opportunity to demonstrate who we are, where we have come from and to share our unique heritage.

In short, we need Less Oy, and More Joy!

May the coming year bring peace to our people and our world.

Wishing you and your families a Shanah Tovah U'Metukah. ■



I have spent time with proud and flourishing Jewish communities. We – the Jewish people – have resilience in our DNA.

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The weight of the past year is heavy. Our hearts are with Israel, still grieving, still healing, still defending. Across the Jewish world the need is greater than it has been in a generation.

Support, resilience and rebuilding are not abstract ideas — they are urgent realities.

So please donate what you can to this year's important causes, for a brighter Jewish future in our community and beyond.

Thank you.

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CST wishes all of our **community** a Chag Sameach and a better year ahead.

We also want to thank you for the last two years. We want to thank you for the **trust** and the support you have given to CST as we do our utmost to give you safety and **security**.

We want to thank you for being determined to lead the Jewish lives of your choice: because that is why CST does our work. If we have helped to give you strength, then that is our privilege.

Security begins with the partnership between you, your communities and CST. We know that security measures can be annoying, but they need to be there for when times are tough.

The last two years have shown the need for security. There has been far too much anti-Jewish hatred, including the threat of terrorism. Even if Israel somehow finds peace, it will take a very long time for the hatred and the terrorist threat across Britain to meaningfully decline.

Our partnership is with you, every member of our Jewish community. Your reports of antisemitism and suspicious behaviour give us what we need to best organise our security, and to get the support of police and politicians. When you follow our security advice, it not only helps your own safety, it also helps the safety of your family, friends and fellow congregants.

Your resilience and keeping calm, especially in tough times, are vital in projecting the basic strength of our community.

Our community is strong and so is CST. We are not separate to our community, we are part of it. You give us our personnel and we give the training, teamwork and skillset. That is how, in two years, we have more than doubled the number of events we are guarding, working three times the number of hours.

CST's professionalism means we manage £18m of government money that pays for commercial (not CST) security guards to work at our schools, shuls and community centres. Hundreds of those sites have CCTV and radio connection to our 24/7 National Security Control Centre.

We still need more people to help in this vital work. If you are physically capable of joining us please do so and don't leave it up to others.

A deep thank you to all of our volunteer security personnel. Some of you have protected our communities for a very long time and then, after 7 October 2023, you stepped it up to yet another level. Others have joined us after that fateful day, bringing more strength when we really needed it.

Thanks to all of our community for supporting CST. From all of us, we wish you a Happy New Year, and a safe and meaningful fast.

Chag Sameach

Report suspicious activity and antisemitism to CST at cst.org.uk/report

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SCAN TO SIGN UP

WELCOME MR PRESIDENT

Julian Pollard *exclusively* interviewed **Saul Taylor**
the new President of the United Synagogue



Saul Taylor and President Herzog in Jerusalem

I met Saul at his whisky brokerage offices in Mill Hill recently. Before we even sat down, the new President of the United Synagogue showed me his mobile phone to demonstrate that the US website had, that day, been hacked (again) and the normal landing page of the US was instead displaying a scantily (un) dressed young woman! Just another headache for Saul Taylor and his team – albeit not the sort of trouble he had bargained for!

Q: What on earth prompted you to offer yourself for the position of President of the US at such a traumatic time for our community?

I see British Jewry at a crossroads and there are important decisions to be made. I want to be part of the leadership that takes the community in the right direction. The US has always held and relied on “the centre ground”. I will focus on the core elements of our constituencies – attracting and engaging with the left and right wherever possible – but not at the expense of our core values.

Q Tell us a bit about your family upbringing and your US roots.

Everyone has their own United Synagogue story. My great-grandfather Harry Schneiderman came to these shores from Biala Podlaska in Poland looking for a better life. Unfortunately, he fell ill on the journey and then caught flu in the pandemic. He tragically died in 1918 aged 25 and is buried in West Ham United Synagogue cemetery.

My great-grandmother, who later remarried was seven months pregnant at the time with my grandfather. My grandfather Revd. Harry Taylor he found his home in the United Synagogue (where uniquely he served the same community in Dollis Hill for 44 years – a record!) and it has been the spiritual home for our family ever since. My father served as vice president of the US, I served on the Board at Stanmore shul and then took office in the US before my recent election. The US is in our family DNA. Indeed it says much for the US that the recent election for President (so often unopposed and always by candidates “of a certain age”) was so hotly contested by candidates of the highest calibre.

Q As President what do you see as your role and what are your plans for your tenure of office?

My strategy aims to set up the United Synagogue for success over the next 25 years. To achieve this I have defined six clear strategic objectives.

1. *A More Inclusive, Community Centred United Synagogue*
2. *Transform Infrastructure and Synagogue Spaces*
3. *Invest in Youth, Tribe and the Next Generation*
4. *Strengthen the Relationship with Israel*
5. *Drive Operational Excellence*

6. *Maintain our Orthodox Integrity*

Q How relevant is the US in the UK today and can – indeed should – it cooperate better with other non-orthodox strands of Jewish observance? Given the growth of charedi factions on the one hand and of Reform, Liberal, Conservative, even Masorti on the other – is it inevitable that the traditional US ground is being undermined as our community shrinks?

Being the youngest President gives me a unique opportunity to engage with and enthuse our youngsters, who are our future. We need our community to stand as united as possible and if that means engaging with all strands of Jewish observance I am happy to do so, but without compromise to the central orthodox tenets of



“

I see the US as standing firmly behind Israel and we should be vocal and active in its support, especially at times when others seek to divide us.

the US – by far the largest section of Anglo-Jewry.

Q Should the US become involved in the politics of Israel, especially when that spills over into internal party politics in the UK?

I see the US as standing firmly behind Israel and we should be vocal and active in its support especially at times when others seek to divide us. The Chief Rabbi has recently made his position clear and as the spiritual leader of the US I share that approach. Any intercommunal differences should be conducted with respect and decorum but the US I lead will follow an unambiguous course.

Q You are very young for the post. The President of the Board of Deputies is also very young. These are usually positions for hardened and experienced candidates familiar with the organisations and how they should be lead. Do you feel you have the necessary experience?

As I have indicated already we are uniquely positioned to gauge and reflect the views of the youth – our future.

Q At the end of your term of office how would you wish the US look?

Let me picture the scene – it's a Sunday afternoon.
You walk in
and you see

rooms filled with excited children who are being inspired by leaders empowered with the latest advances in educational technology.

You move towards the main Shul, where five world-class Rabbinic couples are finishing our training programme and are looking forward to an impactful career in the United Synagogue. In the hall there is a seminar especially for small communities, where the US is renewing its commitment to help Shuls of all sizes.

You see another room setup with a different décor. This is a new Sefardi/Israeli Synagogue that has been integrated into the main community. You finally get to the new café everyone is raving about, but you are disappointed because it's closed for a speed dating event, as the US is now taking an active role encouraging people to find life partners. So you go outside and as it's Yom Yerushalayim there is an Israeli themed BBQ with a live band. The entire outside is decorated with Israeli flags because the US of today is a proud Zionist institution.

This is the United Synagogue that I want to build with every member.

Q How will success be judged?

I have set out five clear Key Performance Indicators by which I want you to judge my success.

1. *Financially – Achieve break even by 2027/28*
2. *Transition to meaningful engagement as a key metric*
3. *Advance at least two major infrastructure projects*
4. *Increased diversity within our membership*
5. *Strengthen the role of the United Synagogue and Chief Rabbi as the voice of Orthodox Judaism*

Q How do you relax?

I love Formula One racing – I am an addict! Sad to say I do not drive a fast car – a mere Tesla! My wife and I love to travel and sample new cuisines and we look forward to the birth of our first child in the next few months – so we may not get much time to relax then.

As I was leaving after the interview, Saul told me how much he valued the success of smaller communities such as a Magen Avot to which he remains deeply committed. The diverse US he envisages covers both large and smaller communities alike as each brings a unique contribution to the US family. ■

Independence starts at home

“My life changed overnight. After having my leg amputated, Jewish Blind & Disabled offered me the housing and support I needed to retain my independence.”

Geoff, JBD Tenant

Jewish Blind & Disabled offers housing and support for adults who have physical disabilities or vision impairments.



To make a donation or to find out more about our housing and support, please visit **jbd.org** or call **020 8371 6611**



Support for local people living with sight loss

“I only ever seem to meet other people with sight loss when I am in a hospital waiting room. This group has been so refreshing and a fantastic way to meet people experiencing similar challenges as I am”.

It's 2025, soon to be 5786 in the Jewish calendar, yet we still live in a world that struggles to accommodate diverse needs - with people living with disabilities finding themselves unintentionally isolated. The challenges they face, both visible and invisible, often lead to people being disconnected, misunderstood or overlooked.

However, it doesn't have to be this way, and the power of peer support can reduce some of these barriers. Talking to others who have shared experiences can dismantle this sense of detachment by offering a safe space where stories are heard and voices are amplified.

This is exactly what has happened over this past year, just down the road from your synagogue for a growing group of local Jewish people living with sight loss.

Launched last year by Jewish Blind & Disabled, the support group has become a vital resource for its growing number of participants.

Anthony's journey with sight loss began when he lost his vision to diabetes. He has found support and friendship through our Finchley group, which has been instrumental in helping him navigate his new reality; "It's always the simple things like cooking that I can struggle with and I might ask someone in the group how they manage with something and then they tell you about things you may not know about. In the group I know I am not alone."

Alongside offering understanding, shared wisdom, a sense of belonging, and empowerment the groups also hear from topical and often empowering speakers from across the sight loss world. Recent



speakers in Finchley have included the RNIB lead from the Low Vision Clinic, the Thomas Pocklington Trust, Jonathan Arbo, Inclusion Barnet and Sandi Wasmmer - CEO of ENEL.

Through sharing experiences members of the group identified their struggles with accessing synagogue services and events and have transformed their collective experiences into organising a series of constructive and informative 'sight loss education sessions'.

Alongside receiving vital information and support to empower participants to live well with their sight loss, the group

have been empowered to inform and educate to help change attitudes and increase awareness of the challenges people with sight loss face in their daily lives.

Any adult who is experiencing sight loss and identifies as Jewish is welcome to join this group - as are their friends, carers and family members. The Finchley group meet at 11.30 - 1pm on the second Thursday of each month.

For more information contact Toni Lewis on 020 8371 6611 ext 620 or email toni@jbd.org

HOW TO SURVIVE IN TIMES OF UNCERTAINTY

*(What not to do, from
someone who's tried)*

By qualified career coach Harriet Morris-Sloane

I type this sitting on a flight back from a few days away. Trying to type on a large, old and sluggish laptop whilst sitting in a seat the size of a walnut, with as much personal space as a rush hour Tube in the height of sweaty summer, is not making me very popular with my neighbours. But my neighbours are (most of) my family and they're trying to watch a film, together, without me, so quite frankly they deserve the elbowing, colonisation of their drinks' tables and the ever-increasing volume of my tapping on the keys aided by the tumbler of wine the lovely air hostess has just passed me.

Anyway, to the subject at hand. How to survive in times of uncertainty. This is not in any way intended to be a self-help guide (in case that wasn't obvious), but merely to provide you with some insight of what not to do, possibly saving you the bother of trying, and maybe share a few things that could be more helpful.

Rosh Hashanah is a time of (menu prep, frantic cooking, but also) reflection. An opportunity many of us use to take stock (not that kind of stock), to analyse what went well and work out what next:

- Where do I want to see myself this time next year?

- What will help me achieve that and what could hinder me?
- What do I think the world will look like this time next year?
- How do I win the lottery?

And with the world as it is at the moment, that reflection, and the general navigation of day-to-day life, can feel uncertain, uncomfortable and at times overwhelming.

Here are some things that haven't helped:

1 BE LIKE AN OSTRICH Pretend nothing is changing at all. Hum loudly. Keep your eyes closed and your fingers crossed, hoping it'll all turn out for the best. (She types reaching for the glass of wine.) OK

so maybe that isn't the most active of options, but it does make the present feel slightly more manageable, until it comes looming into focus and then proceed to No. 2.

2 RUN AROUND SCREAMING Have you ever had the urge to stand in a crowd of people and scream loudly to see if anyone notices? Just me? Don't try, the outcomes won't be positive. I do occasionally look at all the glasses on my shelf and wonder how satisfying it would be just to swipe them all off, but I'd be the one sweeping up all the mess so it's less appealing.

I have now taken over a third tray table.

3 BUY STUFF This worked well for all the "preppers" during Covid. Who would have thought the future lay in toilet paper options? Pretty specific though and you have to have some insight into what the next "must have" commodity is in advance – loo roll today, toothpaste tomorrow?

4 BUY PRETTY STUFF OK, so loo roll isn't your thing, and stockpiling dried goods is only going to result in the kids begging you for pasta every night when they realise supply has finally, finally outstripped necessity (but I promise if you do this demand will dry up quicker than a felt tip without a lid, and the spaghetti will sit there until it anthropomorphises



Determine what you can control, what you can influence, and what is totally outside both your control and your influence.

and walks itself out of your cupboard judging you as it goes) so how about buying pretty, sparkly things? They are portable and tend to fit in a bag, not very economical though.

The laptop, my hands, and various parts of the seat are now covered in rich tomato sauce from a leftover shakshuka. I am just sad Imogen isn't travelling with us – a fourth space would come in handy right now.

5 IMAGINE A LIFE ELSEWHERE – Spend hours, days, weeks trawling the internet with key search terms “Jewish community in Barbados” or “nice places to live with good kosher food”; it’s amazing what

pops up on your social news feed after that. Nothing positive. If you’re already au fait with the changing world around us, use AI to help with prompts like:

6 “FIND ME A PLACE TO LIVE WITH: A Jewish community, no antisemitism, warm weather, good work prospects, no cost of living crisis, a leading healthcare system, education for all and support for the elderly.” I have found it is possible to stump AI.

If you’re looking for something more useful, here are some ideas:

Evaluate the change.

Whilst not all change is progress, some definitely is. Evaluating and assessing those changes that are making you feel uncertain will help you decide how you may wish to progress, and focus on the things that are more positive and reduce the feeling of overwhelm.

Focus on your sphere of control and influence.

There are many things over which we have no control. Worrying about them is a waste of energy, brain space and emotions. (Easier said than done, I know, but it is possible to develop this skill.)

Determine what you can control, what you can influence, and what is totally outside both your control and your influence. This will help you focus on the things you can do something about.

Once you have identified those things within your sphere of control and influence, create a plan with clear goals, actions that will help you meet those goals, and measures of success. This will give you a feeling of having more control over some of the uncertainty and give you a sense of progress, reducing the feeling of overwhelm.

For things outside your control and influence, determine what, if anything,

you can do to bring them within your control or influence. You may not be able to control some outside force, but you can control how you prepare or respond to it. We can’t control or influence the weather, but we can manage it better by looking at the weather forecast and responding appropriately.

And the things over which you have no control, influence, or ability to manage – acknowledge how they make you feel and move them to one side.

Create connections and have meaningful conversations.

“A problem shared is a problem halved,” as the old adage goes. Talk to people around you, your network, your community, your friends and family. Knowing you are not alone can be incredibly powerful and yield surprising results. Sometimes discovering other people feel that same way can be comforting; getting advice from those around you and creating meaningful connections can improve your outlook and make you feel happier and more supported, especially in times of uncertainty.

Do the things you like.

OK, so knitting won’t solve the problems of the world, but it will help you. Making time to enjoy yourself and relax doesn’t mean you aren’t bothered by all that is swirling around you, but it does give you time to focus on something you love and feel in control of, and brings some peace of mind. Giving yourself permission to turn off sometimes is important. You can’t pour from an empty jug, and it takes much longer to fill it up again as well. Speaking of empty...

Wellbeing and mindfulness.

Creating time and space to focus on the present and the immediate surrounding can be really helpful for positive mental health. It allows us to slow down, enjoy life around us, and acknowledge success.

Being mindful helps to control a wandering mind and stops our minds from focusing on the uncertainty. This isn’t the same as being an ostrich, it’s not ignoring the fact that there is a lot of change and uncertainty, but it is helping to process thoughts in a more structured and meaningful way whilst creating time and space to acknowledge the things around you that are positive. Creating that positivity will make the other things feel more manageable.

Whatever you do, be kind to yourself. ■

YOU GOTTA HAVE FAITH

Esther Bentley sits down with newly appointed Shul Chair, **Jonathan Faith**, and his wife **Sharon** to discuss community, leadership, and the vision for the future. Together, they share personal reflections, hopes for the kehilla, and the values guiding their journey forward.

Q: Jonathan, congratulations on becoming the new Chairman of Magen Avot, and thank you Sharon for supporting him in leading our community to even greater things. Jonathan, tell us about your upbringing.

JONATHAN: My father came to the UK on the Kindertransport from Hamburg, Germany. My mother was from Tottenham. We were traditional rather than strictly religious, but I attended a Jewish kindergarten and enjoyed a warm Jewish home. My education took me through St Paul's and then into accountancy. I eventually joined the family business, Faith Shoes, where I worked for 28 years, selling it in 2004. Since then, I have been involved in property investment, supporting our family's ventures, and dedicating more time to Jewish educational projects with organisations such as Aish and Seed.

Q: Sharon, how about your background?

SHARON: My father was born in Belfast, trained as a doctor, and worked in various

parts of the UK before settling in Harlow, Essex, where he built a medical practice that still bears his name today. My mother was from Upper Clapton and modelled for various London fashion houses.

I studied law, qualified as a solicitor, and worked in Epping & Harley Street W1. Jonathan and I met in 1984. We were inadvertently introduced by a mutual friend recruiting for a spring holiday in north Wales, who told Jonathan that he wouldn't fancy me but I was a good cook! Which is funny as frankly I could burn water. We got engaged five weeks after we returned from the holiday. Forty-one years later we are blessed with four children and, so far, seven highly adorable grandchildren – with more to come, please G-d.

Q: How would you describe your children?

SHARON: We are extremely proud of each of them. They are all very different, certainly across the religious spectrum, but they are all straightforward, hard-working and professionally ambitious. They have blessed our family with their wonderful

partners and are living meaningful Jewishly connected lives, in their own individual way. The greatest blessing is that they all live close by, so we enjoy plenty of time together with them and our grandchildren.

Q: How did your spiritual journey develop?

SHARON: When we married we wanted to build a Jewish home and raise our children in a warm, observant environment. Over time, our connection to the community grew stronger, and in 2000 we moved to Hendon to be part of a vibrant, like-minded community.

Q: Jonathan, tell us about your charity work.

JONATHAN: I have always wanted to strengthen Jewish life in the UK. At Aish, I worked on initiatives to help young Jews reconnect to their heritage. With Seed, I developed an educational programme to give parents and children tools for Jewish learning at home, something that continues to benefit many families today.

Q: Sharon, what about your communal involvement?

SHARON: I have been involved in Jewish education projects, including the Jewish Association for Business Ethics which was school-based.

Q: Jonathan, what are your plans for Magen Avot?

JONATHAN: I'd like to see more young families joining us, with a thriving children's programme and strong community



Jonathan and Sharon Faith

events, and to ensure our financial sustainability for the future.

Q: How do you connect with Israel?

JONATHAN: I have always been a strong supporter of Israel and have invested in projects there. Sharon and I lived in Israel for commercial reasons for eighteen months, which deepened our connection.

Q: How do you relax?

SHARON: Spending time with friends and family, enjoying the grandchildren, and keeping life as stress-free as possible.

JONATHAN: I enjoy football, keeping fit, and encouraging others to live healthier lives through good nutrition and exercise.

Q: And, what would you say is each other's greatest talent?

JONATHAN: Sharon is an outstanding organiser and always makes events special.

SHARON: Jonathan is incredibly focused, determined, and single minded when he needs to be and wants the best for everybody .

Quickfire Q&A

Q:Jonathan-Tottenham or Arsenal?

Tottenham.

Q:Sharon: Early bird or night owl?

Early bird – exhausted by 9pm.

Q:Both of you: Donald Trump or Keir Starmer ?

JONATHAN: Donald Trump!!

SHARON: Neither – one is really flaky and the other one is Donald Trump!

Q:Netanyahu or Bennett ?

JONATHAN: Netanyahu.

SHARON: Bennett.

Q:Going to the theatre or lifting weights?

SHARON: Going to the theatre.

JONATHAN: Definitely lifting weights.

Q: A 20 mile hike or drinking a good red wine?

JONATHAN: A 20 mile hike.

SHARON: Drinking wine .

Well, they do say opposites attract!!!



DANIEL GREENBERG CB

CHATAN

TORAH

Interviewed by Julian Pollard

In the 10th anniversary of the founding of Magen Avot it is wholly appropriate that our Chatan Torah this year is one of the community's founders, Daniel Greenberg. He and his wife, Julia, were instrumental in not merely driving through the forming of the community but key in defining the ethics to which its members still adhere.

Asked whether Magen Avot is a "modern, orthodox" or "Modern Orthodox" community, Daniel comments that the former is a description; the latter is a commitment!

The strength of our community is its diversity where members of differing backgrounds and experiences are welcome. Zionism, feminism, and general equality and diversity are issues which are at the core of MA values for Daniel. In short he is guided by "Torah im derech erez."

He is currently promoting the Jewish Ethics Project, where ethical discussions are encouraged without the political rancour so evident today.

Educated at Cambridge, Daniel has enjoyed a stellar legal career. Firstly as a Parliamentary Counsel drafting legislation for Parliament to approve, then as Counsel for Domestic Legislation in the House of Commons and latterly as Commissioner for Parliamentary Standards – ensuring MPs adhere to high ethical standards within the accepted norms of Parliament and public life. He is in effect the referee encouraging and facilitating good conduct and admonishing misconduct. He has also found time to edit judicial dictionaries and various works on law, including

Westlaw UK, and is a consultant editor of the Oxford English Dictionary. In 2021 he was honoured by appointment as a Companion of the Order of the Bath, for services to Parliament.

Daniel thinks MPs are scrutinised as never before (in the press and social media) and that their conduct is at least comparable to conduct in the past but that some decent Members are being deterred from public life to the detriment of the democratic process. Expectations are high – possibly too high.

His legislative work as part of the democratisation process has taken him to far-flung British Dependencies (Falkland Islands, Gibraltar) and other countries (including Albania, Myanmar, Malaysia, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka) but he counts as his greatest contribution the drafting of the legislation underpinning the Good Friday Agreement, which settled the "troubles" in Northern Ireland. He regularly visits Stormont to assist the Assembly in various ways to this day.

He is also proud of ensuring the removal of the Vagrancy Act (a petty and vindictive Act dating from Victorian days) from the statute book – work he undertook for the Crisis charity on a pro bono basis.

After 38 years service in Parliament (he retires in two years) and now having attained the age of three score years, Daniel reflects on giving back the benefit of his experience to younger colleagues and those aspiring to enter public service. Outreach and engagement are keystones to this approach. He says he thinks more slowly but better with age, and greatly enjoys sharing his experience with young

students and professionals.

A regular contributor to BBC Radio 4's "Thought for the Day," he also speaks at many diverse engagements including universities, where he politely tries to persuade "activists" that the world today is enormously complex and that slogans are not solutions.

Family is hugely important to Daniel and his wife, Julia. Eldest son Yisroel, a lawyer in local government, is married to Jenny, a teacher, and they live in north London. Avi (who is completing a PHD in bioinformatics) lives in Israel and is married to Elisheva, an optometrist. Shira (a pharmacist) is married to Yair (a software designer for Google) and they too live in Israel. Elisheva lives in London and is a civil servant. Daniel and Julia have seven grandchildren: Tova, Nissim, Chanel, Yona, Itamar, Nava and Afik.

Is he proud of his children and grandchildren? He replies that rather he takes pleasure in them. He does not claim pride in their successes and achievements; that is for them to enjoy!

His main retirement project is already planned out – he hopes to produce a detailed legal historical guide to the works of Victorian novelists Anthony Trollope, Charles Dickens and RS Surtees (who influenced Kipling, Sassoon, Thackeray and others). Sounds like a monumental tome in the making!

Daniel concludes: "I am truly delighted to be honoured by the community and to share this simcha with Rafi Kleiman – a young and energetic Chatan Bereshit who is so skillfully educating and encouraging our future leaders." ■

RAFI KLEIMAN

CHATAN BEREISHIT



Interviewed by Julian Pollard

This time last year we were excited at the appointment of Rafi as the dynamic leader of our Magen Maxi Services and, together with Ariella Ovits (daughter of last year's Chatten Torah), Rafi has been instrumental in revitalising the children's services at Magen Avot.

Born in South London in 1998, he spent his formative years in Leeds and after school, Rafi spent two years at Yeshivat HaKotel in Jerusalem before taking up a place at Leeds Beckett University where he took a First Class Degree in Youth Work and Community Development.

Rafi and Sophie were married in June 2024. An English graduate from Kings College London, Sophie recently completed a year working at Bnei Akiva as Educational Director and since September last year, she runs events and marketing co-ordination at Stanmore shul. Sophie is also the longest serving Youth Director within the United Synagogue (heading into her fifth year!).

Since January 2025 Rafi has been appointed Assistant Head of Informal Education at Yavneh College in Borehamwood. His role is to "bring Judaism to life" and enrich the Jewish experience. So he sees his weekday school role as very complimentary to the work at Magen Avot with our Magen Maxis Group which he leads so enthusiastically.

Working closely with Ariella Ovits our Magen Minis Leader, whom he cannot praise too highly, Rafi brings enthusiasm and new ideas to developing programmes to attract our youth. New children are coming to these services and the retention rate is enviably high.

"What are our goals? To educate, be creative and provide an enriching opportunity to engage with Judaism in shul and carry that on into their week."

To what does he attribute the success of the Magen Maxis and Minis?

"It is not a weekly 'club for kids' but rather offers the children the chance to enjoy and understand the shul experience. The Magen Medals are coveted prizes which reward attendance and good participation and we encourage all the children to get involved.. The Horim Yeladim services on Motzei Shabbat in the winter months encourage parents and children to come and learn together, win Magen Medals and enjoy pizza and chocolates at the end of the evening".

Rafi understands that education requires the need to combine a 'wild heart', being creative and energetic, while retaining a benevolent 'soft front' and a firm 'strong back' in order to 'hold the room' efficiently and effectively.

Rafi was surprised and delighted to be selected as Chatan Bereshit.

"When I was young in Leeds it was elderly top-hatted gentlemen who became chatanim – not the young blood like me! But I am even more honoured to share this special simcha with Daniel Greenberg who displays the very essence of Magen Avot. I have always admired his passionate dedication to the ethos of the community. He demonstrates how principles can be put into practice and how to hold unwavering Jewish values in the modern world.

"It is a privilege for Sophie and I to share this Simcha with Daneil and Julia.



Bünting's world map

I must also pay tribute to the incredible contribution that Sophie has brought to the teenagers of our community – This honour is therefore very much a celebration of Sophie as much as it might be for me!

Rafi relaxes by showing continued loyalty to his beloved Leeds United FC (recently returned to the giddy heights of the Premier League!), hiking and enjoying travel – especially recent trips to Morocco, Tuscany and most recently Thailand, where he and Sophie had a magical time and were well looked after at various Chabad centres!

He recently returned – hugely enthused – from a series of seminars at the National Library of Israel where he had access to rare and exciting source materials to aid his educational projects in the future. This included the very famous map of the world dating from 1581 by Heinrich Bünting showing Jerusalem at its very centre.

As Judaism and its capital city lie at Rafi's heart too, this could not have been more fitting. ■

HEROIC JEWISH WOMEN IN THE HOLOCAUST

COURAGE, RESILIENCE AND SURVIVAL

by Simon Bentley

At a time when anti-Semitism is once again rising across the world, in rhetoric, in violence, and in the questioning of Jewish memory, it is essential to recall the courage and resilience shown by Jewish women during the Holocaust. Their heroism is not only a chapter of history but also a living example of strength in the face of hatred and oppression.

During the Shoah, Jewish women assumed roles that were often life-threatening and far beyond what was expected of them. They became fighters, couriers, rescuers, documenters and guardians of dignity amidst dehumanization. In doing so, they defied both Nazi brutality and the constraints of traditional gender roles.

The stories of these women remind us that anti-Semitism, even at its most destructive, could not extinguish courage, creativity or compassion. Their actions continue to inspire us today – a testament to the power of resistance in all its forms, and a reminder of the responsibility we carry to oppose antisemitism wherever it resurfaces.

This paper highlights five such women, each of whom embodied heroism through life-threatening acts of defiance. By remembering them, we not only honour their sacrifice but also draw lessons of resilience and moral courage to guide us in our own time.

The themes of their heroism came in many forms:

Defiance: Taking up arms, defying Nazi orders, escaping ghettos and camps.

Solidarity: Protecting others, from hiding children to feeding the sick.

Witnessing: Preserving memory through writing, teaching, and testimony.

Endurance: Survival itself was an act of resistance for many women.

A unique and haunting example of women's roles in the camps was the

Women's Orchestra of Auschwitz, led by Alma Rosé, a Viennese Jewish violinist and niece of composer Gustav Mahler. It was formed under SS orders in 1943, as an orchestra of female prisoners who were mostly Jewish. They played, as work gangs left and returned from forced labour, at roll calls, and for SS officers' entertainment.

Music became both a cruel tool of the Nazis and a fragile lifeline for the women: Orchestra members received slightly better conditions, which sometimes saved them from immediate death.

Survivors recalled the bitter irony – music meant to give “order” to brutality, yet it also gave women the will to live another day.

Heroic Jewish women during the Holocaust demonstrated immeasurable courage, through resistance, solidarity, memory and the power of the human spirit.

Hannah Szenes (Senesh) (1921-1944)



Chanah Senesh was a Hungarian-born celebrated poet and Zionist. She trained with the British Special Operations Executive and as one of 37 Jewish volunteers from Mandatory Palestine

parachuted into Nazi-occupied Europe with the British army, to help organise Jewish resistance and rescue efforts. She was captured and tortured in Hungary, and executed on 7 November 1944 at just 23. She is revered in Israel as a national heroine. Her poetry continues to inspire, especially her most famous poem *A Walk to Caesarea* הליכה לקיסריה with the

opening words “*Eli, Eli,*” is frequently recited in commemorations. In Hungary, her legacy has been slower to gain recognition, though she was officially exonerated in 1993.

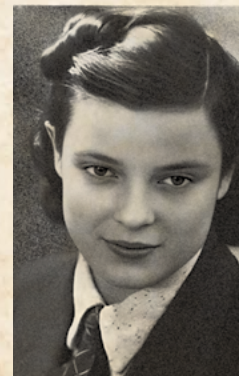
Zivia Lubetkin (1914-1978)



Zivia Lubetkin was one of the leaders of the Jewish underground in Nazi-occupied Warsaw and the only woman on the high command of the resistance group *Zydowska Organizacja*

Bojowa. She was a leader in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising (1943). As one of only 34 fighters to survive the uprising, she survived the Holocaust in German-occupied Poland and immigrated to Mandate Palestine in 1946 at the age of 32. Lubetkin helped found *Kibbutz Lohamei HaGeta'ot* in Israel and was a co-founder of the Ghetto Fighters' House museum.

Faye Schulman (1919-2015)



Faye Schulman was a Jewish partisan photographer and the only such photographer to document their struggle in Eastern Europe in World War II.

After

Germany invaded the Soviet Union, Schulman's family was split up, with most of them, including Schulman

herself, being imprisoned in the Lenin Ghetto, while two of her brothers were sent to a labour camp. On August 14, 1942, German forces killed 1,850 Jews from the ghetto, sparing only 28 for their skills useful to the Nazis, Schulman among them, due to her photography skills. Shortly after the massacre she was ordered to develop photos by the Nazis, which she made personal copies of in secret. One of these photos was one in which she recognized the faces of some of her family members, dead in a mass grave, which made her determined to join the resistance.

About a month after her capture, when Soviet guerrillas attacked the locale; they allowed her to flee with them. She joined the Molotava Brigade, which was composed mostly of Soviet prisoners of war who had escaped from German captivity, working as a nurse and soldier for them from September 1942 to July 1944. After a raid of the Lenin Ghetto, she regained the photography equipment, eventually taking more than 100 photographs of the Resistance. When the Red Army liberated Belarus in July 1944, she was reunited with two of her brothers and left the brigade after being introduced to her future husband, Morris Schulman.

About the Soviet partisans, Schulman recalled: "We didn't think in terms of men and women, boys and girls. We treated each other as equals. There were no special privileges for women, we were all partisans, and we knew that death in war did not spare anyone. Certainly, in battle, there was no differentiation between men and women. All our thoughts were concentrated on defeating the enemy.

"Because I was Jewish, I had to work twice as hard to be deemed as worthy as the gentile girls. When I worked night and day I was told, 'You are not like a Jewish girl. You are just like the Russian girls.' This was meant to be a compliment." She always replied: "Yes, but I am Jewish." She said: "My work as a nurse, a photographer and most of all as a soldier was plentiful reason for me to stand tall, to be proud of myself and my heritage."

Schulman has been decorated by the Soviet/Belarusian, American and Canadian governments. In 1995, she wrote "A Partisan's Memoir: Woman of the Holocaust." She was later featured in a 1999 PBS documentary, "Daring to Resist: Three Women Face the Holocaust." In 2000 she was the subject of Shelley Saywell's documentary film "Out of the Fire." She is currently featured in the documentary "Four Winters: A Story

of Jewish Partisan Resistance and Bravery in WW2."

Vladka Meed (1921-2012)

Vladka Meed's mother, brother and



sister died in the Treblinka extermination camp. She was spared when they were taken because she worked in a German factory and had papers to show the Nazis when they raided her town.

She and her future husband, Benjamin Meed, pretended to be Aryans and helped organise the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. After the final destruction of the Warsaw Ghetto, Meed was active in the Jewish underground movement, which supported Jews survive in Warsaw and its surroundings. Using a false identity, she travelled with forged permits to bring financial and emotional aid to Jews in hiding.

In 1963, Meed and her husband founded the Warsaw Ghetto Resistance Organization (WAGRO).

For nearly 20 years she organised summer trips for teachers, educating them on the Holocaust, and the Jewish history of Warsaw. According to The New York Times obituary, she was a central source of the 2001 television film "Uprising."

Rachel Auerbach (1903-1976)

Rachel (Rokhl) Auerbach was an Israeli



writer, essayist, historian, Holocaust scholar and Holocaust survivor. She wrote prolifically in both Polish and Yiddish, focusing on prewar Jewish cultural life and

postwar Holocaust documentation and witness testimonies. She was one of the three surviving members of the covert Oyneg Shabes group led by Emanuel Ringelblum that chronicled daily life in the Warsaw Ghetto and she initiated the excavation of the group's buried manuscripts after the war. In Israel she directed the Department for the Collection of Witness Testimony at Yad

Vashem from 1954 to 1968.

Auerbach escaped from the Warsaw Ghetto on March 9, 1943, and worked on the Aryan side as a Polish secretary. By night, she continued recording her historical notes of Jews at that time. She wrote "Yizkor," a lengthy essay about the summer 1942 Warsaw Ghetto deportation, and another piece recounting the lives of Jewish writers, artists and cultural activists in Warsaw, both of which were widely circulated underground. "Yizkor" featured themes that would appear frequently in the books she wrote after the war, including "the importance of the culture that was destroyed; the humanity and specific identity of the victims; the responsibility to remember; and the difficulty of finding appropriate words to convey the enormity of the loss." Auerbach's writings were vital to postwar Holocaust history.

In 2025 The Jewish Brand, with which I am closely associated, published "The Jewish Revolt," a meticulous record of the Warsaw Ghetto Revolt of 1943 by Auerbach – a deeply moving account of the heroism and sacrifice of the fighters and the records they kept and which she unearthed after the War.

The lives of these five women illuminate the remarkable ways in which Jewish women confronted the horrors of the Holocaust with courage, ingenuity and resilience. Whether parachuting into occupied Europe, leading resistance in ghettos, smuggling weapons and children to safety, preserving testimonies for future generations, or even turning music into a fragile lifeline in Auschwitz, their actions defied both Nazi oppression and the gendered expectations of their time.

Each story reminds us that heroism was not only found in the battlefield or in overt defiance, but also in the choices to nurture, to protect, to document, and to endure. Their sacrifices and achievements form part of the wider narrative of resistance, where survival itself could be an act of defiance.

By recalling these women's names and deeds, we affirm their place in Holocaust memory and history. They were not passive victims, but active agents whose determination left a legacy of strength and humanity in the face of unprecedented brutality. Their example challenges us to recognise the many forms that resistance can take, and to honour those who, often at the cost of their own lives, chose to act with extraordinary courage. ■

DONATING THE VECHT FAMILY ARCHIVE TO THE WIENER LIBRARY

by Joshua Vecht and Dr Romeo Vecht

The Wiener Holocaust Library in central London has been designated by Arts Council England as a Collection of National Significance. It is the world's oldest and Britain's largest collection of original archival material on the Nazi era and the Holocaust. In February 2025 **Dr Romeo Vecht**, father to our own Joshua Vecht, delivered an address entitled *"Origin & Salvation"* when the archive was handed over. This is an expanded version of that speech with additional material supplied by Joshua.

“Ladies and gentlemen, it is truly an honour to be here today. I've heard about this library for as long as I can remember. It is a well-known institution, and this is the library of the Holocaust, which carries a tremendous legacy. I must say that I am very proud to be here and share my story, which is quite an unusual one in the context of Holocaust history.

“My story began about 50 years ago when my late father passed away. I was left with a suitcase full of papers, all in disarray. At that time, I was too busy with my cardiac practice to pay much attention to the contents. But upon retirement, I decided to dive into these papers and study them. What I discovered was incredible, and it is

what I'm here to talk about today.

“About a year ago, I met Howard [Senior Archivist] at the Wiener library, and after showing him what I had, he was deeply moved by it. He made the decision to house these documents here at this esteemed institution. So, everything you see today is part of this collection.

“Regarding my Dutch ancestry, our surname, Vecht, comes from a river in Holland. Back in around 1810, Napoleon's brother decided that all Jews should have a proper surname. Those living near the Vecht River took on the name.

“When I was born in Antwerp in 1935, my Hebrew name was Abraham, 'Romi' to the family. As rumours about Hitler began to spread, my father went straight to the British Embassy, seeking safety. At that

time, Romi was not an acceptable name. In a state of panic, my father suggested 'Romeo', a nice name but I've had to carry the brunt of it consequently.

“At the time of Reformation in the 16th century, Holland became a very liberal tolerant country, where Jews were allowed to live freely and practice their religion. There were Jews in nearly every village, and there were no expulsions, pogroms or ghettos, unlike most other European countries. This continued until the outbreak of the Second World War, when anti-Semitism brought devastation to the Jewish community in Holland.

“The statistics are horrifying. Of the 100,000 Jews in Holland, 75,000 perished by the end of the war. Most died in Auschwitz and Sobibor. I remember visiting Auschwitz in my younger years when the Russians were still there. I cheated my way to visit the archives. We found the names of some 34 Vechts deported from Holland, and one name stood out, 'Faartje' aged 16, with an arrow pointing towards the name 'Mengele'. Never to be heard of again.

“The virus of anti-Semitism spread across Europe, even to Holland. The Dutch, who had long lived harmoniously with Jews, turned against them. The late Chief Rabbi, Lord Jonathan Sacks, zt”l, referred to this as a 'virus'. As a medical professional, I can tell you that the virus analogy is apt. Once infected, it never really



Aaron Vecht 1854-1908



Bales of Wool being sorted



Factory, Islington, Christchurch, New Zealand.

leaves the body. It can lie dormant for years, as we've seen with the herpes zoster virus, which can persist in the brain long after the initial infection."

History

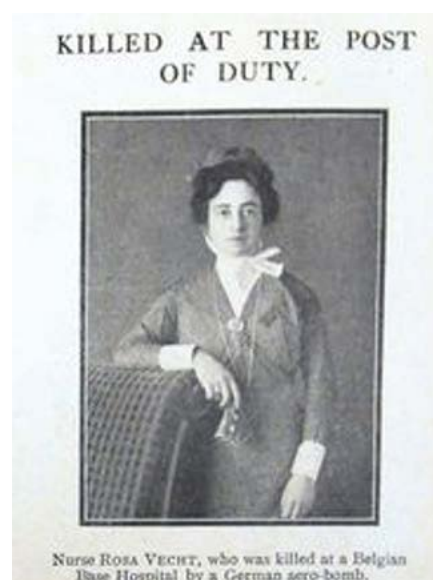
"My great-grandparents were called Van Den Bergh, from my Dutch family line and my grandfather, Aaron Vecht (1854-1908), married a Vandenberg daughter and founded the famous Van Den Bergh margarine business. He was sent to London to introduce margarine into England but failed as the British farmers wouldn't adopt it.

"As a result of this, he pivoted into the meat industry with enormous success! He spent 20 years in London, where he became very involved with the beginning of the Zionist movement but moved to Australia in the early 1890s, where he is quoted to have introduced Zionism into Australia.

"Aaron Vecht was born in Holland and became a highly successful entrepreneur in

the meat processing industry. He had lived in Argentina, South Africa, New Zealand and Australia – where his son Philip was born – hence our British citizenship, which became important as we shall see. It is no exaggeration to say that Aaron Vecht became one of the world's pre-eminent meat curing moguls with new patented methods of curing meat products which were distributed across the globe. He had invented an early form of refrigeration for the meat industry whilst still in Holland and later set up a processing factory in Islington, Christchurch, New Zealand.

"There was a key question at the time about when meat should be koshered: at the time of slaughter or upon arrival in England after the long journey by sea. The rabbis' responsa to his shaila was that the meat must be koshered at the time of slaughter. This correspondence is still available. He died in Antwerp 1908 and in accordance with his last wish was to be buried in the Holy Land and he was interred in Trumpeldor cemetery Tel Aviv."



Rosa Vecht

The family knew tragedy during the First World War.

In 1915 the Sydney Herald recorded the death of Aaron's niece Rosa from enemy bombing action in Belgium. She lived in neutral Holland, fell in love with a non-Jewish boy and left her parents in Elburg to study nursing in Amsterdam. She then joined a hospital in war-torn Belgium. Nurse Rosa Vecht met her death while nursing the sick and wounded in the ranks of the allied troops in Belgium, being killed by a shell dropped from a German aeroplane. Nurse Vecht was first buried at Ardenkerke with military honours and later transferred to the Jewish Cemetery. The story made the front page of The Daily Mail. Today in Elburg, there is a plaque outside her house and a street named Rosa Vecht."

World War 11

"Moving on to World War II, on May 10th,

1940, when I was just 4 years old, the German bombs began falling on Antwerp. We fled that morning, driving through Shabbat, heading for Dunkirk in France. My maternal grandfather had an Austrian passport as that part of Poland was part of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire. This created an issue with the French authorities. We eventually made it to Dunkirk, having wasted two weeks over the documents, only to be received by German paratroopers.

"My father was taken to Brussels, where he spent three months in a prisoner-of-war camp. Eventually, my mother located him where he was incarcerated and acting as translator of the British prisoners to the German Authorities.

"During the occupation, the Germans allowed Jews in Antwerp to live relatively normal lives for a while, keeping careful records of who they were and what valuables they had. However, things took a serious turn for the worse in June 1941 when the Nazi restrictions on Jews began to take effect.

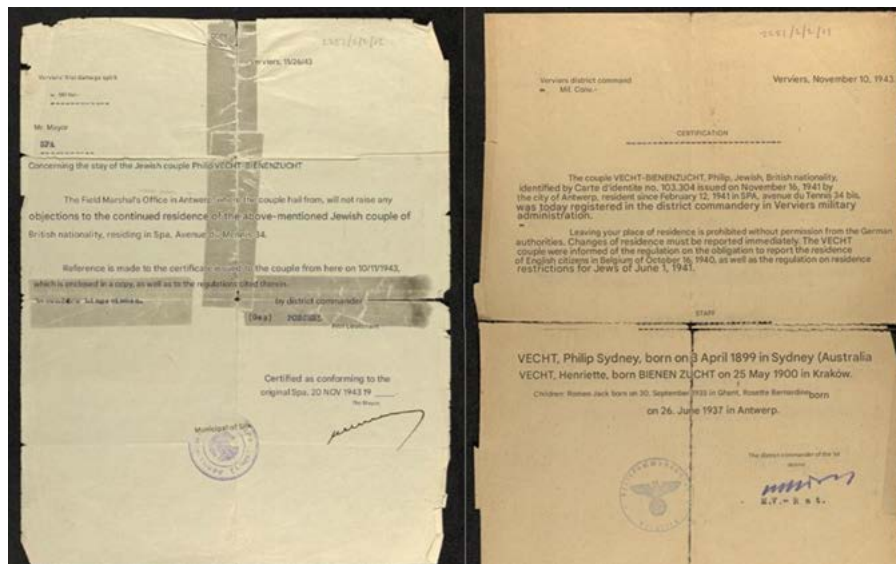
"At this point in the war, my father



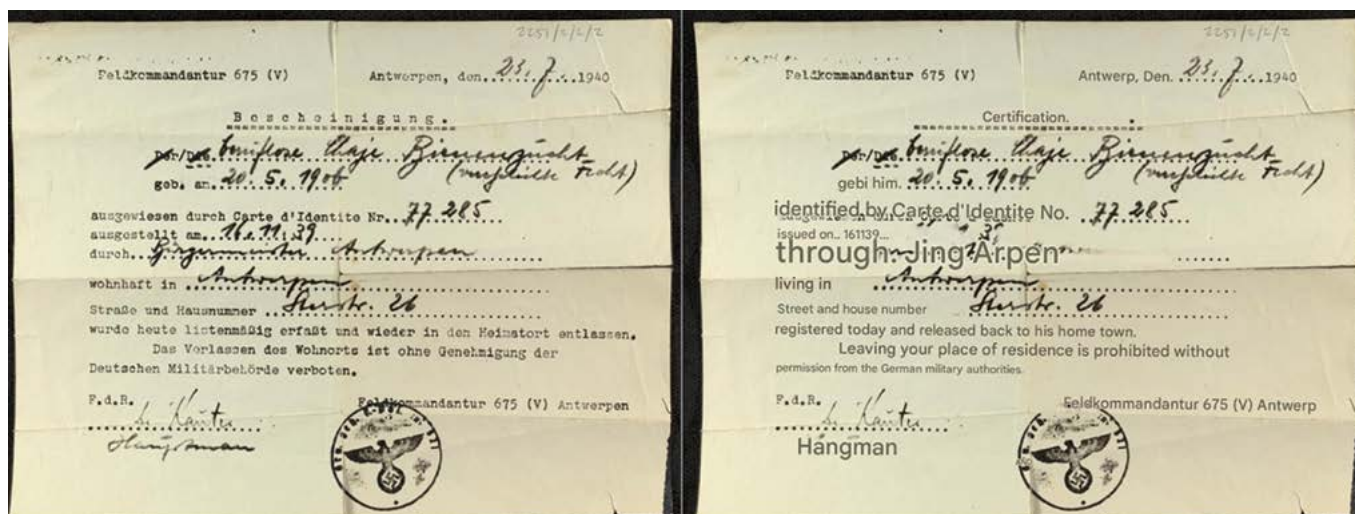
Permit to travel to Brussels, July 1940

to Britain. As the orders transmitted from London were not understood by the Belgians, he was then recruited by the Belgian resistance. He was decorated for his efforts, and one of the most significant pieces of memorabilia from this period is a letter from Dwight Eisenhower thanking him for his contributions.

"Finally, in 1944, the American forces



German ID 1940

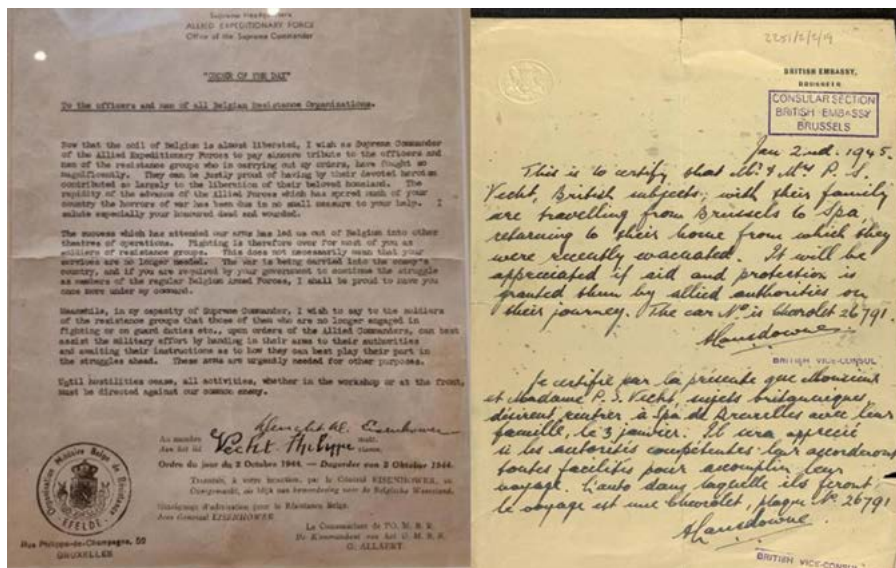


Residence registration – occupied Belgium

approached a Belgian doctor who fabricated a story about my father being paralyzed on the right side. (This was due to polio, which he caught in Australia as a child.) This letter helped us obtain permission to go to Spa, for a 'cure'.

"In Spa, we lived under forced residence, unable to travel or earn money. A number of Jews were hidden locally. By 1943, however, the Germans were growing concerned about Jews still living freely. A letter arrived questioning our continued residence there. Until then, we had been protected by our British nationalities as my father was born in Australia.

"My father began covert work to support the Resistance. My father had been helping to repatriate downed Allied pilots back



'Order of the Day' & British Consul Letter

arrived. On the 10th of September, they liberated us, and I hopped onto the first tank I saw. The Americans, taken by surprise of finding a Jewish family, treated us with incredulity, and I still remember the first time I heard the sound of a shofar in our little bungalow where 30 Jewish GIs took part in Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur services. The Jewish Chaplain, Rabbi Morris Frank, gave me a pair of tefillin, to be worn at my Bar Mitzvah, which I continue to use to this day. We finally achieved freedom, and I recall vividly the moment when we were able to go out freely again, no longer under German occupation. This was the story of my family during World War II, from our early Zionist roots to our survival in occupied Belgium. The legacy of those years still shapes who I am today."

A Family Sefer

Josh recalls: "My family owns a very special Sefer Torah, one that has passed down five generations in the family, and in the process has been hidden from the Nazis, been shot at and even had its own seat on an El Al flight. The scroll was commissioned by my great-grandfather, Aaron Vecht, when he moved his family



to Australia in 1890. When Aaron died in 1908, it was handed down to the youngest of his 10 children, my paternal grandfather, Philip Vecht. The family later moved to Antwerp and when the Nazis invaded in 1940, the family hid the scroll from the Gestapo, who regularly searched their home in Spa; even bayoneting the mattresses in case there were hidden pilots; but fortunately, they never found the family Torah.

"In December 1944 the Germans made a final counter-attack at the Battle

of the Bulge and the family had to flee hurriedly. The Torah was one of the main possessions my grandfather took during the escape. Their car was shot at, but the Torah survived. Over the next 70 years, the Torah passed from synagogues and minyans in Belgium, London's Lauderdale Road shul and now belongs to my brother Philip, and is in use in Caesaria in Israel. It was last used for a family simcha in 2008 at a family Bar Mitzvah at St Johns Wood shul. The scroll forms a connection between all our generations." ■



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A BOOK OF JEWISH THOUGHTS

A COLLECTION CELEBRATING THE PRIDE OF JUDAISM

by Julian Pollard

A **Book of Jewish Thoughts** was first published in 1917 for the use of Jewish soldiers and sailors. It was designed to fit into the breast pocket of a military uniform. It is an anthology selection of Jewish wisdom through the millennia assembled by Chief Rabbi Dr J H Hertz, and became hugely popular. In describing its goals, he wrote that it “brings the message of Judaism together with memories of Jewish martyrdom and spiritual achievement throughout the ages.”

During World War II the book was republished by Rabbi Hertz in 1940 so that the 7,000 Jewish servicemen and women, leaving for the war against the Nazis, would have a book to remind them of their Jewish heritage. It was a kind of spiritual guide to **Why We Fight**.

Rabbi Hertz compiled a collection of writings that range from ancient

and contemporary sources, from the second-century BCE to those from the 19th and early 20th centuries: Albert Einstein, Mahatma Gandhi, Leo Tolstoy, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, William Blake, President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain.

A Book of Jewish Thoughts ran to 25 editions and has been translated into several languages, including Hebrew and Arabic. The extracts are mostly short and easy to read; the translations are clear and flowing. It is a book which one can read from cover to cover or dip into for inspiration during times of reflection.

There is beauty and power in the writing, an eloquence that captures the essence of great thoughts and thinkers and reveals an extraordinary capacity for hope, love and peace.

It tells us how Jews defined their faith, and how they saw the crisis in Nazi Europe in the context of a long

history of persecution and survival. Hitler's Germany systematically waged war on the Jews of Europe, beginning with Germany's own Jews whose rights, livelihoods and, in so many cases, lives had been shredded by Nazi ideology. Worse horrors were to come: the ghettos of Warsaw, Krakow and Lodz; the death camps of Chelmno, Sobibor, Treblinka, Belzec and Auschwitz.

But there is hope too. The 1940 edition cites the Balfour Declaration and looks forward to the creation of the State of Israel, just eight years later in 1948. After 2,000 years of wandering, Jews would return to their homeland.

This slim but compelling and evocative anthology is all the more relevant to us today as we fight a media and online “war,” and we all need inspiration and hope in increasingly challenging times.

Copies of this book have been donated to Magen Avot and can be used by members during Yizkor services, Armistice Day memorial services or simply during the year. ■

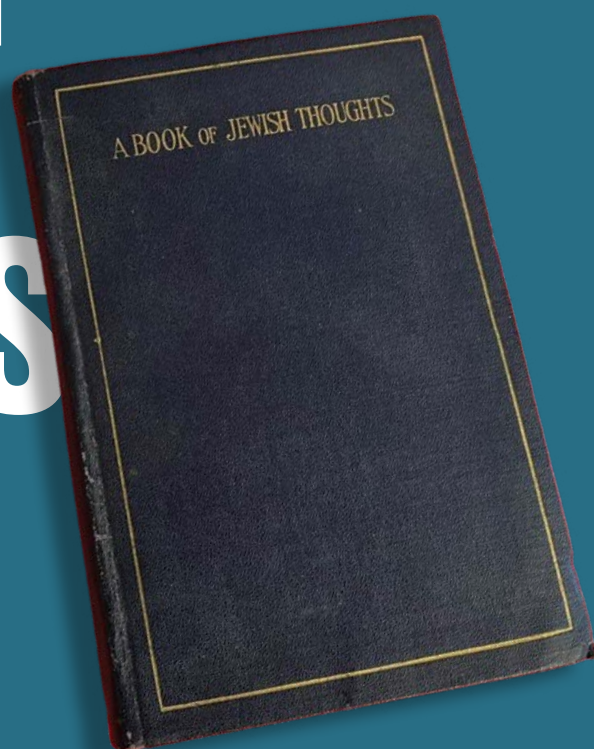
Note:

This book is published by **The Jewish Brand Limited** a London-based charity dedicated to preserving Jewish heritage and identity. They use art, entertainment, culture, and community to counter antisemitism and amplify Jewish creativity. Their mission is to support Jewish talent, share new perspectives, and connect people through meaningful projects and storytelling.

From inspiration to education, guidance and support to live events, we aim to inspire, excite, and bring people together - within the Jewish community and beyond.

Other recent publications include: **The Jewish Revolt** by Rachel Auerbach – a detailed analysis of the resistance of the Warsaw Ghetto in 1943.

See: www.thejewishbrand.com





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FEAR AND JOY ON THE DAYS OF AWE

(ADAPTED FROM THE WRITINGS OF R' CHAIM GOLDVICH,
SEFER ASOFOS MA'ARACHOS, YOMIM NORAIM)

by Rabbi Steven Gaffin

Let's begin with a perplexing medrash and then ask three questions:

"You shall say before Hashem your God, 'I have put away the holy things out of my house, and have given them to the Levite, to the foreigner, to the fatherless, and to the widow...'" "Look down (*hashkifa*) from Your Holy Habitation, from heaven, and bless your people Israel..." Rabbi Huna bar Aha in the name of Rabbi Alexandros said: "Come and see the power of those who keep the Commandments, because all 'lookings down (*hashkafot*)' in the Torah are curses but this one is in the language of blessing." (*Talmud Yerushalmi, Ma'aser Sheini, 5:5*)

Question 1 – Why would we assume that this "*hashkafa*" was bad at all – so much so in fact that it had to be flipped / transformed into a "*hashkafa* of bracha"? Apparently, this is because Chazal tell us that all uses of the word "*hashkafa*" implies curse, and yet here, the language is clearly angled towards bracha.

Question 2 – This *pasuk* refers to a person who has just finished tithing his produce,

supporting the convert, the orphan and the widow, and is implicitly positive. Here is an individual who certainly falls into the category of one who "has done all the *mitzvos* which You commanded without transgressing or forgetting [any detail]." Surely such a person is in line for a "*hashkafa tova*." Why then use this phraseology which is so negative that it needs to be transformed to good?

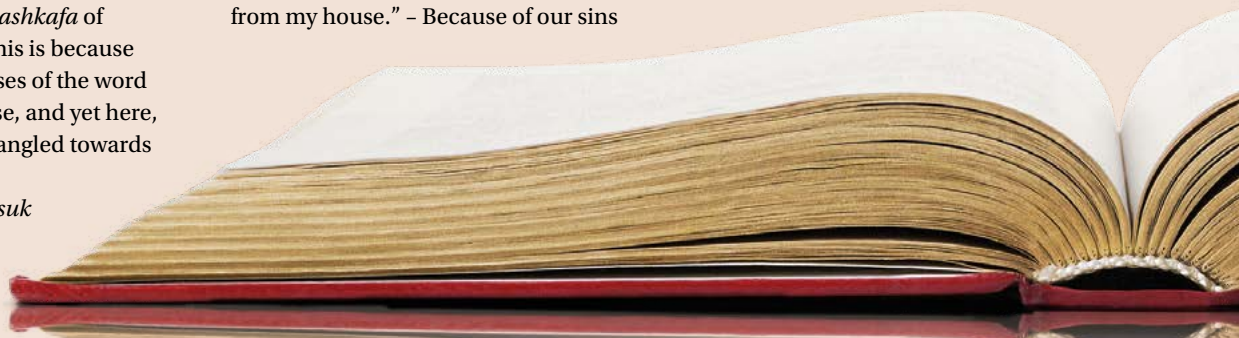
Question 3 – What is the connection between this verbal confession which is an act obligatory for those who have sinned and the act of doing the mitzvah of taking *ma'aser*? Additionally, why mandate a verbal confession specifically at the time one removes "the kodesh from the house"?

Let's look at Sforno on this *pasuk* for the start of an answer:

SV: "I have removed the holy things from my house." – Because of our sins

and the sins of our fathers, the [Divine] service was removed from the firstborn who were [originally] fitting [to receive] *trumos* and *ma'aseros* – this is the confession on *ma'aser* that our Rabbis mentioned... And even though it has been given to the Levi ..., I pray that You [God] should look [down] with a positive look in place of the negative look appropriate for my sins." (*Sforno, Devarim, 26:12-15*)

Originally *Terumos* and *Ma'aseros* were to "remain in the house" and be given to the "eldest in the house" – the firstborn. But the sin of the *Eigel* caused the "house to be emptied" as it were. The verbal confession here is connected to a sinful act and from there we arrive at the "cursed *hashkafa*" connected to the performance of the mitzvah. The mention of the sin and its consequence,



"the emptying of the house," requires the one doing that mitzvah to stand before Hashem in verbal confession. Yet, this mitzvah opens the way for a specific and very special *simcha* – "I have done everything according to what You commanded" – in other words, I rejoiced and caused others to rejoice too.

What has all this got to do with the *Yamim Noraim*?

We have seen that the *simcha* of doing *mitzvos* is rejoicing in connecting with the will of God. Additionally, there is great power in doing a mitzvah with a joyous heart – rejoicing in doing the *mitzvos* of Hashem overpowers the machinations of a sinful heart. I have "removed the *kodesh* from the house" – and nevertheless I am full of *simcha*. Rav Chaim Goldvicht z"l explains that fulfilling a mitzvah with *simcha* **despite** this "*hashkafa ra'a*" which follows it, is precisely the thing through which this person merits *bracha*. Further, this pathway to transforming curse into blessing is specifically applicable to the coronation of Hashem on *Yom HaDin*.

The act of Coronation – crowning Hashem king – is the central event waking up every living being on *Rosh Hashanah*. On this day, mankind is judged. The books of life and death are open. The act of coronation places the King of the Universe on the throne of judgment. We choose to place Him there. And yet the way we observe this day is not entirely consistent with this reality.

To illustrate, consider the following source:

"... Rabbi Simon said, it is written: "For who is a great nation?" – The earthly custom is that when a person has a court case, they dress in black and wrap their heads in black ... but Israel don't behave like this: They dress in white and wrap their heads in white ... they cut their beards and trim their nails, they eat, drink and rejoice on *Rosh Hashanah* because they know that the Holy One Blessed be He will do a miracle for them..." (Tur, Orach Chaim 581:2)

The different emotions one is



The act of Coronation – crowning Hashem king – is the central event waking up every living being on Rosh Hashanah. On this day, mankind is judged. The books of life and death are open. The act of coronation places the King of the Universe on the throne of judgment.

required to feel on *Rosh Hashanah* seem contradictory. On the one hand we are told by Nechemia to go and "eat of the fat, and drink of the sweet," On the other hand, sources dealing with the shofar seem to entirely opposite, with the *Gemara* in *Rosh Hashanah* describing the day as one of wailings, moanings, sighs and whimpers. Chazal understand this as indicating a requirement to be broken hearted!

So which is it?

The act of coronation, which is the key to feeling the fear of judgment, actually arouses the love of God, which in turn brings out the awe of the King of the whole earth who stands exalted. Two opposite emotions in the service of a single crowning moment. The image here is of a king crowned by his children. By

its very nature, there will be familial joy mixed with trepidation of the exalted level of their father. However, over time, these initially strong feelings toward the king become dampened and weakened by habit and passage of time until the children are seen violating the laws of the king, whom they themselves crowned.

Now the king is sitting in judgment and this arouses in their souls two strong emotions simultaneously: First, there is fear of their exalted father mixed with embarrassment. But just as strong is the arousal of the bond that exists between children and their father. It is the recognition of kingship which intensifies these feelings of closeness and love of a child towards its father.

These feelings of closeness and the closeness of the children to the king throw their sins into sharp relief. It is this that leads to the feeling of trembling overcoming any other feeling. From here we see that not only is there no contradiction between these two emotions but they actually work in synergy with each other: This is the situation of those whose father is their king and whose king is their father. One who sins against the king arouses the mercy of the father, and that mercy in turn arouses trembling and embarrassment as if they appeared before the king in "filthy clothes" as it were. This is the wailing and whimpering mentioned regarding the shofar.

It is this mixture of emotions which paves a way for us to successfully negotiate *Yom HaDin*. At the very moment of coronation when everything is awe and fear of judgment, we are simultaneously filled with a happiness which comes from their closeness to the king. This happiness is so deeply planted within us that it is unaffected by the coronation and the impending judgment it brings with it. This situation arouses love and transforms *din* to *rachamim*, as Pesikta DeRav Kahanna explains: Although God's throne is a vehicle for justice, shofar blowing transforms this into mercy, as it were.

In this situation *din* itself agrees that *rachamim* is appropriate – in other words, that here *rachamim* is actually the most appropriate manifestation of *din*. Since we ourselves arranged the coronation and conducted it, in full knowledge of the *din* that would accompany it, and rejoiced in the coronation, *din* itself demands *rachamim* – since by doing this we have invited judgment on ourselves. ■



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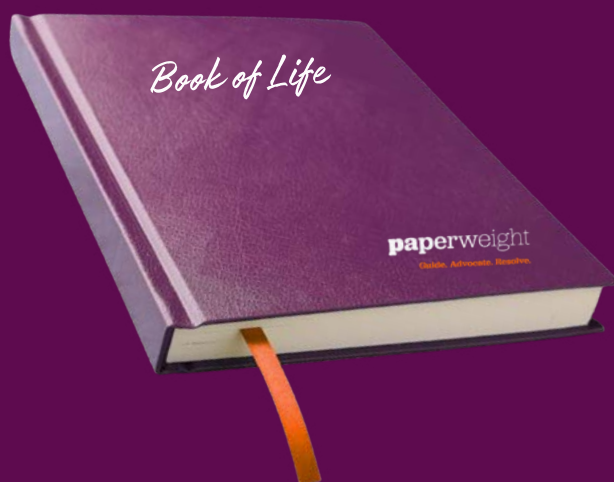
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My Background

I grew up mostly in Hendon (there was a small stint in Edgware) and lived with my parents, Fiona and Richard, and my three younger siblings, Amikel, Alon and Devorah. After getting married in August 2024, I moved to Finchley with my wife, Sophie.

I attended JFS for secondary school, where I was very involved in the PE department and spent many late afternoons playing various sports for the school, winning a few awards along the way for my participation.

Before going to university I took a gap year and spent five months of it on a programme on Kibbutz Sde Eliyahu in Northern Israel. This involved spending three days a week in ulpan and two days a week working in different fields and orchards.

After my fun in Israel, I began my three-year degree studying paramedic science at the University of Hertfordshire. Whilst there, I was on the Jewish Society (JSoc) committee as the inclusion officer, and later as president. I was honoured to be awarded the 'liberation and inclusion initiative of the year award' and the 'Alan Senitt z"l award' for outstanding contribution to campus life by the Union of Jewish Students (UJS), for my work in the JSoc. I graduated from Herts in June 2023 and started my career as a paramedic that year in November.

My Work

The organisation of the ambulance service has changed significantly since first being created.

I work with a range of people on an emergency ambulance – including associate ambulance practitioners (AAPs), emergency medical technicians and paramedics. We see the same types of patients, but we have studied for different amounts of time and therefore have slightly different levels of knowledge and skills. Paramedics can also work solo on fast-response units, in management support, as advisors in a clinical hub and more. Our role includes making critical decisions mostly autonomously, and providing medical care based on a patient's presentation.

The ambulance service also has non-emergency transport vehicles staffed by ambulance people, and first-response vehicles staffed by volunteer emergency responders.

At a higher skill level, there are several specialist roles, including advanced paramedics, paramedics working on HEMS (the helicopter service) and clinical team managers.



A DAY IN THE LIFE OF EMMA TAYLOR-LEVY, PARAMEDIC

A 'Typical' Day

Every day brings new challenges, so while there is no true 'typical' shift, these anonymised accounts give an impression of my work as a paramedic on an ambulance.

I begin my day at an ambulance station in North London in my green uniform (with lots of pockets!) and black steel-toe boots. I check which ambulance we're using for the day and grab the keys and

my kit bag, which contains personal protective equipment, including hi-vis jackets and a helmet. My crewmate and I check the ambulance thoroughly to make sure we have all our equipment and that it's in working order. I sign out medications we might need for the day, including pain relief, anti-seizure medication, adrenaline for anaphylaxis, medication for breathing issues, and medication for a person in cardiac arrest (where their heart has stopped working).



My crewmate and I will log in to the on-board computer screen in the ambulance and hit the big green button, marking us available for a job. We usually take turns driving to and from each patient.

We'll be sent to the closest patient who has been waiting the longest and is in the most urgent category – this is triaged by call handlers. There are four categories of calls, with 'Cat 1' being the highest and 'Cat 4' the lowest. We respond with blue lights and sirens to any patient in Category 3 or above – which, due to my skill level in the ambulance service, is nearly all of them.

An example of a day for me has been:

A 79-year-old woman with a urinary infection who received antibiotics from a GP two days previously but the medication hasn't started to work quickly enough and her condition has since declined. She now has reduced mobility (is finding it more difficult to walk around and is at an increased risk of having a fall) and she has become confused. We helped her into the ambulance and took her to the nearest A&E.

A 46-year-old man with a new cough and chest tightness felt that he couldn't breathe properly. After checking his observations, listening to his chest, and

performing an ECG, I reassured him it was most likely a viral infection. I arranged for his GP surgery to call him back later that day to make a follow-up appointment for him in the coming days.

An 88-year-old woman had fallen and hit her head. Her reduced consciousness made me suspect a brain bleed. I administered IV medication to try to control internal bleeding, and we 'blue'd' her (took her under blue lights and sirens) to a specific hospital with a major trauma unit.

A 61-year-old man developed sudden numbness and weakness in his right arm and leg, as well as a change in his speech. I suspected him to be having a stroke. I 'blue'd' him to a specific hospital that had a stroke unit, rather than our closest A&E, to get him treated quickly.

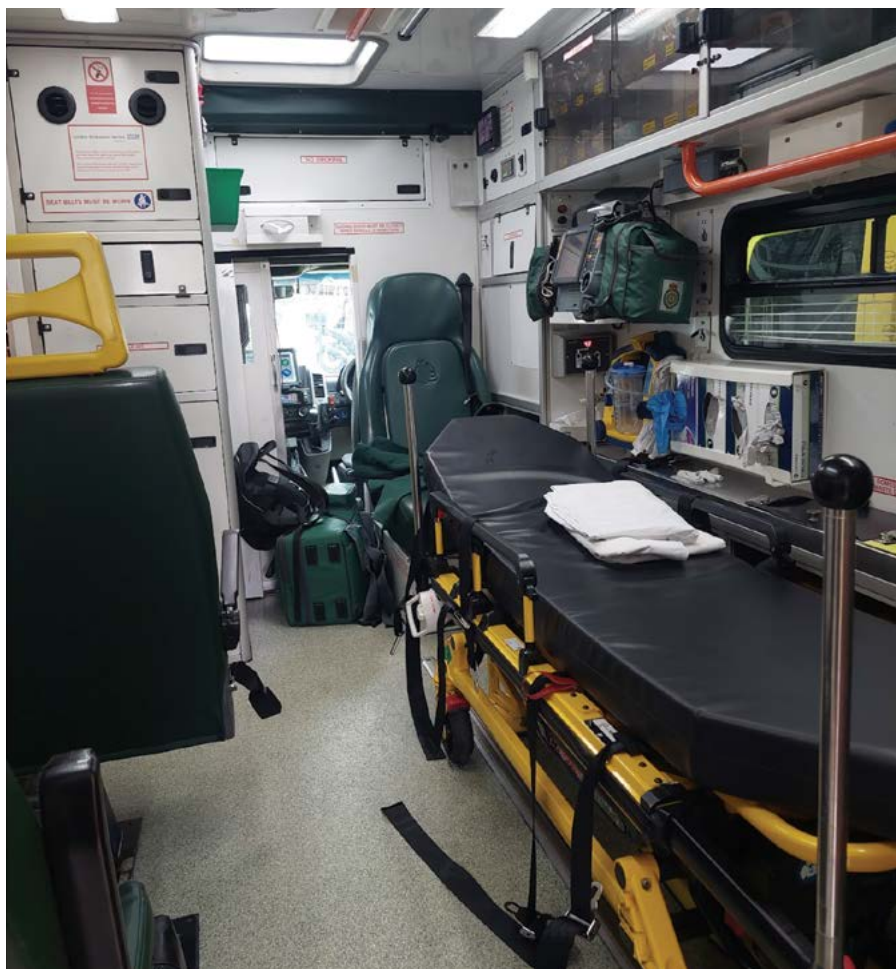
A 93-year-old man had been having some shortness of breath over the last few days and some swelling in his left leg. I suspected his symptoms were from his chronic heart failure, which he was already on medication for. A nurse had visited him earlier and he had agreed to go to hospital but when we arrived he said he preferred to try treatment at home first. I contacted a geriatrician and managed to organise a prescription with an increased dose of his medication and book him a follow-up appointment with his own GP.

A 34-year-old woman, who was living in supported living accommodation, was having a mental health crisis. She had a history of paranoid schizophrenia, anxiety and depression. She was having distressing auditory hallucinations. I conveyed her to a mental health crisis assessment centre (mental health A&E) where she could be helped by professionals.

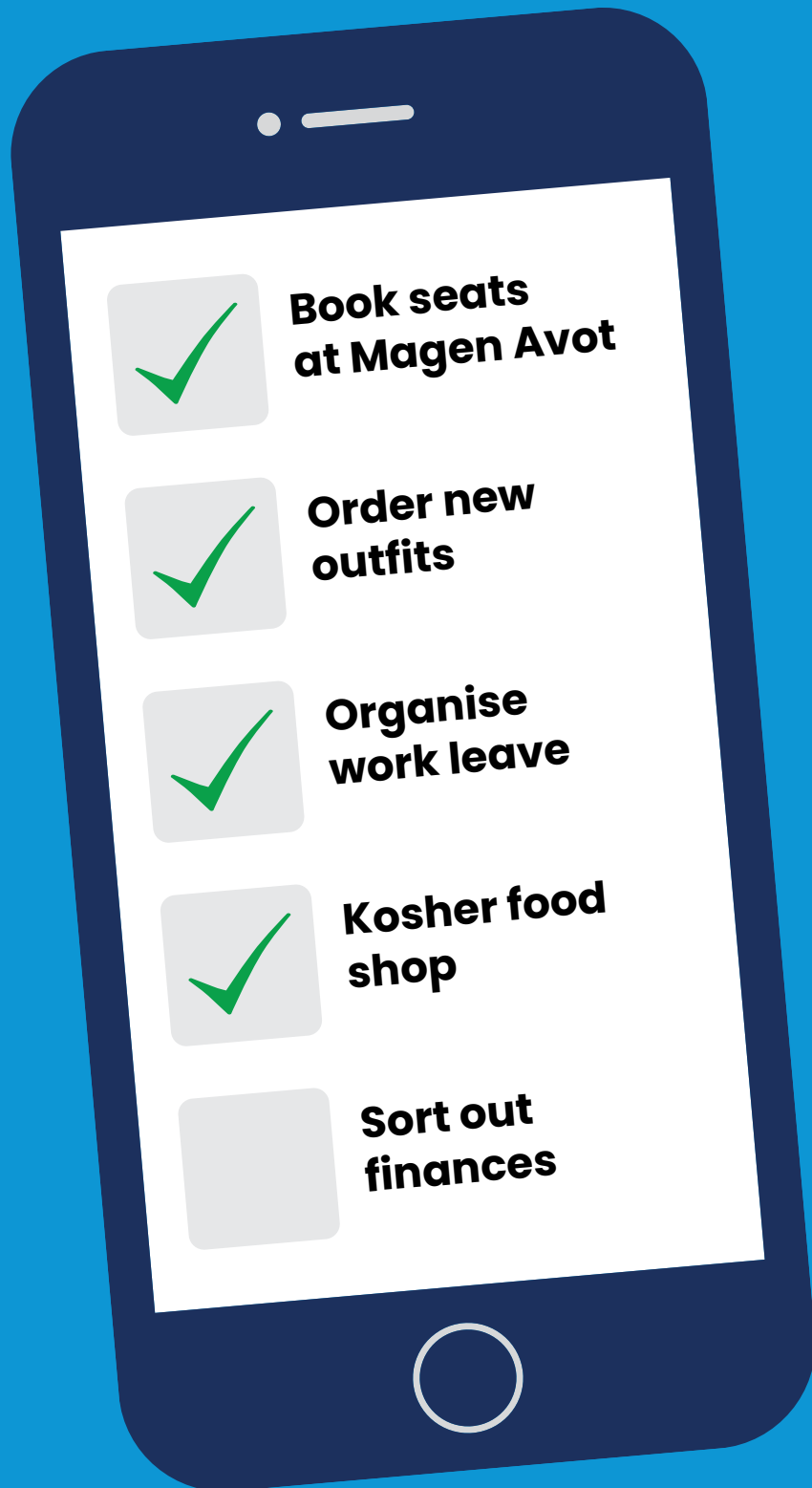
At the end of the shift – hopefully without overrunning the 12 hours – we returned to the ambulance station, handed back medications and equipment, and headed home.

Life Not at Work

After my four 12-hour shifts a week (that have included early morning, afternoon and evening start times) I get five days off. I tend to need to catch up on quite a lot of sleep and rest but I also use this time to see friends, go back to my parents to say hi to the cat (and the family), do some exercise, bake bread and spend some quality time with Sophie. I also usually have a project of some sort on the go, such as: helping out editing this magazine; working on bits for the Limmud festival; making graphics for the Jewish network at work; and doing some sort of LGBT+ activism. ■



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The Arch of Titus
showing the removal of
spoils from the Temple.

THE JOURNEY OF ROME'S JEWS: FROM ANCIENT TIMES TO TODAY

PART 1

by Aliza Spizzichino

Of all the Jewish communities in the world, the Roman Jewish community (also known as Bnei Romi) is believed to be one of the oldest, with roots stretching back over two millennia. Having studied in a Sephardi primary school and then an Ashkenazi secondary school, it felt like I had studied just about every Jewish community except for my own. I am a Roman Jew, born and raised in the UK, with limited exposure to my ancestral traditions.

It became obvious that this paper was an opportunity to delve into my own heritage. So I decided to investigate the origins of my community and, by extension, my own family lineage. I wanted to explore the

importance of the Jewish Ghetto in Rome, and the history and unique minhagim and prayers of the Roman Jewish community.

The History of the Jews in Rome

The Roman Jewish community is often regarded as one of the most ancient in the Jewish Diaspora, with roots extending back to the Second Temple period.¹ Unlike Sephardi Jews (descendants of Spanish Jewry) or Ashkenazi Jews (from Germanic Europe), Roman Jews trace

their ancestry directly to Judea.²

According to a variety of sources, Jews arrived in Rome as early as the second century BCE, drawn by opportunities to establish business connections in the flourishing Roman Republic.³ We have written evidence from that time, as we can see in the Book of Maccabees Chapter 8:

וַיֵּשְׂאוּ אֶת רִגְלָם וַיֵּלְכוּ מִהֶלֶךְ רַב עַד בּוֹאֵם לְרֹמָא... יְהוּדָה הַמַּכְבִּי וְאֶחָיו וְעַם הַיְּהוּדִים שָׁלְחוּנוּ אֵלֵיהֶם לְהָקִים בְּרִית שְׁלוֹם אִתָּכֶם. וְעַתָּה הוֹאִילֹ נָא כְּתוּב זְכוֹרֹן בְּסֵפֶר, כִּי אֲחִיכֶם וְאֲנָשֵׁי בְרִיתְכֶם הֵמָּה.

They went therefore to Rome, which was a very great journey... Judas Maccabeus with his brethren, and the people of the Jews, have sent us unto you, to make a confederacy and peace with you, and that we might be registered your confederates and friends.⁴

In this source, we see that Eupoleus, son of John, and Jason, son of Eleazar, sought an alliance with Judas Maccabeus, leader of the revolt against the rule of King Antiochus Epiphanes over the land of Israel. These two ambassadors, according to tradition,

2 Openshaw, Gene (8 February 2014). 'Rome's Jewish Legacy' <https://www.ricksteves.com/watch-read-listen/read/articles/romes-jewish-legacy>

3 Misano, Marco (14 August 2020). 'History', <https://romanjews.com/history/>

4 The book of Maccabees I was written during 2nd Temple Judea (c.145 - c.125 BCE) and is an apocryphal work about the victories of the Maccabees over the Syrian Greeks. Written in Hebrew by a Jewish author who may have been an eyewitness to the events he describes, the work is considered an important source for the period. It has no official religious status in Judaism but it is often studied to enrich one's understanding of the events commemorated on Chanukah.

1 Fondazione Beni Culturali Ebraici in Italia (29 October 2021). "The Jewish Story of Rome, Italy," <https://www.worldjewishtravel.org/listing/the-jewish-story-of-rome>



The Ghetto of Rome

were hosted by Jewish merchants and freed slaves who were already living in Rome.⁵

In 63 BCE, Judea was conquered by the Romans and was incorporated into the Roman Republic by General Pompey. Pompey had been asked to mediate the dispute between Hyrcanus II and Aristobulus II, the two sons of the Hasmonean Queen Alexandra Salome, over the right to inherit the throne. The conflict led to a war, and Pompey himself claimed power. The conquest resulted in the end of an independent Jewish state, incorporating Judea into the Roman Republic, and later, a province in the Roman Empire.⁶ Pompey also enslaved Jewish prisoners and brought them to Rome. Many of them were redeemed by the local Jewish community, and chose to remain in Rome.⁷

Although Pompey entered the Kodesh HaKodashim, and thus desecrated it, he removed neither ceremonial objects nor other treasure, and the following day ordered the Beit HaMikdash cleansed and its rituals resumed.⁸

Despite Pompey largely allowing free religious practice in Judea, the divide between religious views caused clashes between the Jews and gentiles. This, alongside imperialism and heavy taxes, precipitated the First Jewish Revolt in 66 CE. Jewish forces managed to expel the Romans from Jerusalem, but Emperor Nero responded by sending General Vespasian to meet the Jewish forces. Vespasian was proclaimed Emperor, and in April of 70 CE, the Roman

General Titus besieged Jerusalem.⁹

In August of 70 CE, in the Hebrew month of Av, the Second Beit HaMikdash was destroyed. Rome celebrated the fall of Jerusalem by erecting the Arch of Titus, constructed by Titus' younger brother Emperor Domitian, in 81 CE.¹⁰ At an unknown date, a social ban on Jews walking under the arch was placed, and this was not rescinded until 1947,¹¹ following the UN vote to establish the State of Israel. The change was not made public until 1997.¹² Interestingly, the menorah on the Arch of Titus was used as the source for the symbol of the State of Israel.¹³

Following the Roman conquest of Judea in the first century CE and the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash, a significant influx of Jewish slaves was brought into Rome and forced into servitude. These Jews initially settled outside the city, in a district across the Tiber River known as Trastevere. Over time, they established a vibrant community that retained its identity despite external pressures such as the *fiscus judaicus*. This "Jewish tax" of half a shekel was imposed by Vespasian to be paid to the Roman treasury, replacing the tithe that had been paid to the Beit HaMikdash.¹⁴ The Jews in Rome during this period of time became a significant part of the Roman Empire's population, with some estimates as high as 7 million people (10% of the population at the time).¹⁵

Roman policy created tensions throughout the Empire, resulting in more Jewish revolts in the Land of Israel and the Diaspora. The last of these, the Bar Kochba Revolt (132-135 CE), occurred in Israel. Crushed by the Romans, it cost the lives of thousands of Jews, and many others were taken to Rome as slaves. As on other occasions, the Jews of Rome sought to rescue them, and many of them remained in the city. Despite the revolts, during the period of the Roman Empire, the Jews of Rome had long years of prosperity and autonomy, unlike during the Middle Ages.¹⁶

Medieval Jewish life in Rome was turbulent and fraught with discrimination. Due to the Papal States – territories in central Italy that were directly governed by the pope – Catholics had considerably more rights than members of other religions. Jews were not admitted to Papal government or to social circles of Rome, and did not have the same standing as members of the Catholic faith.¹⁷ Despite this discrimination, Roman Jews contributed to society as artisans, merchants, scholars, and more.¹⁸ They were even protected when, in 1492, Pope Alexander VI welcomed approximately 9,000 Jews expelled by the Alhambra Decree, issued by the Catholic Monarchs of Spain.¹⁹

The Roman Ghetto

Rome's Jewish quarter, located on the east bank of the Tiber River, was established by Pope Paul IV in 1555 as a result of the papal bull *Cum nimis absurdum*. It sought

5 Jewish Community of Rome (28 May 2023). "The Jews in Ancient Rome," <https://romaebraica.it/en/history/>

6 Rocca, Samuel (2008). *The Forts of Judaea 168 BC - AD 73: From the Maccabees to the Fall of Masada*, p. 44-46.

7 Morashá, Edition 104 (July 2019). "Jews of Rome: Ancient Times to the Kingdom of Italy," <https://www.morasha.com.br/en/diaspora-communities/Jews-from-Rome-ancient-times-to-the-kingdom-of-Italy.html>

8 Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*, 1:152-153.

9 See footnote 5.

10 Lohnes, Kate. "Siege of Jerusalem" <https://www.britannica.com/event/Siege-of-Jerusalem-70>

11 The National Library of Israel, description of "Arch of Titus, Rome, 1948" <https://web.nli.org.il/>

12 Piperno, Antonella (24 December 1997). "Under The Arch of Titus the Party of the Jews" <https://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/1997/12/24/sotto-arco-di-tito-la-festa.html>

13 The National Library of Israel, description of "Emblem of the State of Israel." <https://web.nli.org.il/>

14 "Jewish Community of Rome," <https://romaebraica.it/en/history/>

15 Pasachoff, Naomi E.; Littman, Robert J. *A Concise History of the Jewish People*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1995).

16 See footnote #7.

17 Mendez, Jonathan (27 January 2025). "Understanding the Experience of Jewish People in Rome," <https://ansari.nd.edu/news-events/news/understanding-the-experience-of-jewish-people-in-rome/>

18 Levine, Menachem (2 July 2023). "The Jewish History of Rome," <https://aish.com/the-jewish-history-of-rome/>

19 Rifenberck, Madison (8 May 2023). "Mapping the Migration of Sephardic Jews Following Expulsion," <https://storymaps.com/stories/>



The Great Synagogue of Rome

to isolate the Jews and enforce discriminatory measures under the guise of religious purity. It segregated approximately 2,000 Jews into the cramped conditions of a small area. The quarter was walled, and its gates locked at night.

The location of the ghetto was selected due to its undesirable nature, characterized by frequent flooding due to its close proximity to the Tiber River. Additionally, due to the severe restrictions of professions allowed to Jews by *Cum nimis absurdum*, life in the Roman Ghetto was one of intense poverty. Jobs allowed included fishmongers, ragmen, and other second-hand dealers. Interestingly, they were permitted to be pawnbrokers, a job prohibited to Christians, and this caused much hatred from many Christians against the Jews. Jews were required to wear identifying badges, and every Shabbat they were required to attend a nearby Catholic church to hear sermons aimed at converting them.²⁰

As the community within the ghetto grew larger, overcrowding became a serious problem. Jews expanded their houses vertically, further blocking the sun from reaching the streets. Furthermore, diseases like cholera and malaria spread like wildfire. During a plague in 1656, 20% of the ghetto's population of 4,000 died.²¹

When the ghetto was dismantled in 1870, there were approximately 8,000 people living there. Although the Pope intended the hardships of the ghetto to coerce the Jews

into converting to Christianity, it allowed Roman Jewish customs to flourish without disturbance from the outside world.²² As a result, many people argue today that Roman Jews are one of the closest links to the original minhagim of Judea.

Despite the challenges, the Jews of the ghetto developed many distinctive cultural expressions – including unique cuisine, music, and a dialect known as *Giudaico-Romanesco*, which is a mix of Hebrew and Italian.

This blend can be seen with the word *beridde*, meaning 'circumcision': it is a mix of the Italian pronunciation of the Hebrew word *brit*, meaning 'covenant' or 'circumcision.' Italian influence can also be seen with the word "fear": the Hebrew root is *pachad*, which in *Giudaico-Romanesco* became *impachadito*, analogous to the standard Italian adjectival form *impaurito*.²³

The culinary traditions of Roman Jews also emerged as a defining feature of their identity. Dishes like *carciofi alla giudia* (Jewish-style artichokes) and *concia di zucchine* (marinated courgettes) became emblematic of their ingenuity, born from the limited resources available in the ghetto. The city's poor would collect the unwanted leftovers from Testaccio (home to both Italy and Europe's largest slaughterhouse²⁴),

and, with typical Roman resourcefulness, use them to make something delicious. Hence, offal and other cheaper cuts were (and are) common in Roman cooking, including, for example, the delicacy of fried brains.

Today, the Roman Ghetto is a vibrant cultural hub that reflects both its painful history and the enduring spirit of its community.

At the unmarked corner shopfront of the Boccione Jewish bakery, a local landmark for two centuries, the proprietor, Bianca Sonnino, cut me an extra-large slice of *pizza ebraica* (Jewish pizza) — not pizza at all but a dense nutty-fruity coffeecake. Signora Sonnino told me proudly that Boccione has been her family's business for generations and that her mother devised the recipe for *torta della ricotta*.²⁵

Visitors can explore the Great Synagogue of Rome, the Jewish Museum, a Holocaust memorial museum, and local kosher restaurants that serve traditional Jewish-Roman cuisine. The area stands as a testament to the survival and flourishing of a community despite centuries of adversity. ■

Note: This article was written under the supervision of *Rabbanit Dena Rock and Rivkah Moriah* as part of a project for the *Matmidot Scholars Program at Midreshet Lindenbaum in Jerusalem*. Part 2 will appear in the next edition of *HaMagen*.

20 See footnote 17.

21 Pietrangeli, Carlo (1976). *Sant'Angelo. Guida rionali di Roma* (in Italian) p.44. Fratelli Palombi, Roma.

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25 Laskin, David (12 July 2013). "Echoes From the Roman Ghetto," <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/14/travel/echoes-from-the-roman-ghetto.html>



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Magen Avot is a dynamic and welcoming Jewish community, established in 2015 with the support of Chief Rabbi Sir Ephraim Mirvis KBE and the United Synagogue. Based in Hendon, we provide a warm and inclusive environment for individuals and families seeking meaningful Jewish connection, learning, and spiritual growth. Our kehilla gathers in the Nancy Reuben Primary School Hall, creating a space for prayer, Torah study, and communal engagement.

A major milestone in our development was the appointment of Rabbi Yoni and Rebbetzen Dina Golker in 2022, following a community-wide vote. Their leadership has strengthened our vision of a thriving, Torah-centered community, building on the dedication of our previous rabbinic couple, Rabbi Joel and Sarah Kenigsberg.

As we continue to grow, Magen Avot remains committed to fostering a sense of belonging, inspiring religious and personal development, and creating a supportive environment for all who seek a vibrant Jewish life.

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4. Promotion of good decorum in shul
5. Supportive of Israel and its national holidays
6. Involvement and encouragement of children and youth
7. To support and advocate for the interests of those in need including persecuted groups in the UK and abroad, consistent with Torah principles

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STOLPERSTEINE: STUMBLING INTO HISTORY

by Josh Abeles

In March, I was fortunate to accompany my father to Leipzig, Germany, to witness the Stolpersteine ceremony for my late grandparents and great-grandmother.

For those unfamiliar, Stolpersteine, or “stumbling stones” are small brass-plated memorials created by German artist Gunter Demnig in the 1990s to commemorate individuals persecuted or murdered by the Nazis. Each stone is placed in the pavement outside the person’s last freely chosen residence and engraved with their name, birth year, fate, and date of deportation or death.

What began in Cologne has since grown into the world’s largest decentralized memorial, rooted in the idea that remembrance belongs in the everyday spaces where victims once lived. By 2025, more than 100,000 Stolpersteine have been laid across over 30 European countries, honouring Jews, Roma and Sinti, political prisoners, homosexuals, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and others targeted by the Nazi regime.

Although my grandparents had managed to flee Germany before the war, their circumstances entitled them to Stolpersteine outside their last known residence.

My grandfather, who worked in Leipzig’s fur trade near the main station, had a narrow escape in 1936 when he discovered an employee carrying a copy of *Der Stürmer*. When challenged, the young man admitted to being a member of the Hitler Youth and warned my grandfather that “bad things were coming for the Jews,” but advised him to leave while



The Stolpersteine ceremonies are organized by local municipalities and take place every few months, with all stones in a town laid on the same day.

he still could, as he was a “good” Jew. My grandparents heeded the warning, leaving behind family and making their way to England, eventually settling in Golders Green.

Nearly 90 years later, I returned to Leipzig to walk in their footsteps and attend the ceremony outside their former apartment building. Over a brief but moving 24 hours (both in terms of emotion and step count), my father and I walked through many locations of our family history: my grandfather’s old office (now an Indian restaurant), the site of their synagogue *Ez-Chaim*, built in 1922, destroyed during *Kristallnacht* (now a car park with a memorial wall), my grandmother’s former school (today a community centre for the blind), and a poignant memorial of



Josh and his father with Stolpersteine stones

150 empty brass chairs marking another burned synagogue.

The Stolpersteine ceremonies are organized by local municipalities and take place every few months, with all stones in a town laid on the same day. The evening before our ceremony, a reception at the Jewish community centre brought together a diverse group of participants from all over the world who would be witnessing their Stolpersteine the next day. Each was connected to Leipzig’s Jewish history in their own way; some with little connection to Judaism beyond a relative who once lived in the city. The community centre itself was the same building that housed Jewish communal activities in the 1920s and 30s, before it exchanged hands. Now though it’s back with the 1,000-strong Jewish community of Leipzig.

And so on a cold morning in early March, we gathered outside my great-grandmother’s apartment where my grandparents also lived, imagining life there before they fled to England. My great-grandmother only left in 1938 and settled in Manchester. She didn’t survive to see the end of the war. (This is not a reflection on Manchester.)

Though Gunter Demnig himself was unable to attend due to a car accident that morning (I’m told he’s made a full



The stones in place



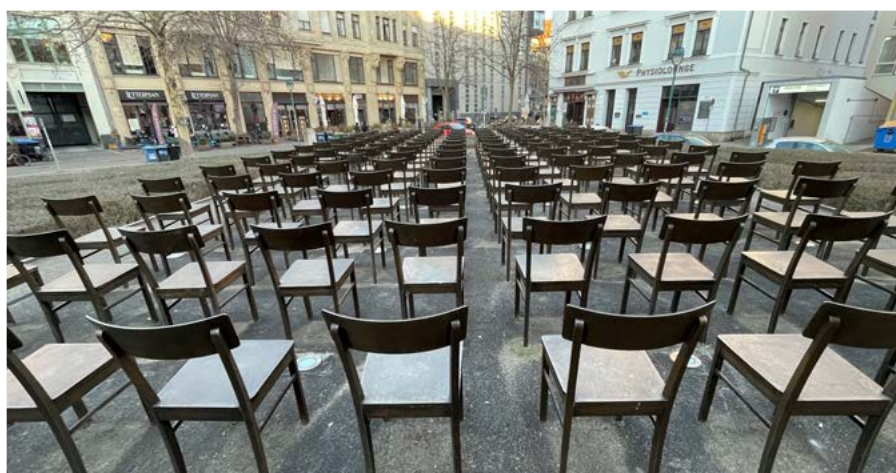
recovery), the team ensured the stones were laid in a ceremony with music, speeches, and local residents joining in this quiet, moving act of remembrance.

As well as being able to retrace my family's steps and accompany my dad to the ceremony, the trip was a humbling glimpse into the kindness and generosity of the people of Leipzig, who welcomed us with warmth and respect.

In particular, the younger generation could hardly comprehend how the events of the 1930s could have happened. Yet today, we face a disturbing shift: anti-Semitism, more overt than it has been for generations, increasingly disguised as criticism of Zionism, providing a pretext for hatred. With the speed and reach of modern media, this threat could escalate rapidly. Our rabbinic and community leaders must act decisively to address it, or we risk seeing the Jewish community in London face challenges similar to those that befell Leipzig and all across Europe just a few generations ago.

The plaque at the memorial on the site of the synagogue which burned down in 1938 reads starkly: "In 1933, there were about 11,000 people confessing to the Jewish faith living in Leipzig... In April 1945, there was no longer any Jewish community life."

My father reflected at the ceremony,

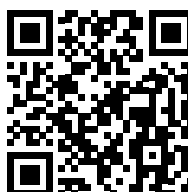


150 empty brass chairs memorial

"But for the events of the 1930s, I probably would have been a proud citizen of Leipzig rather than a proud citizen of London. But that's how life has gone."

While Stolpersteine mark the past across Europe, we cannot stumble into tomorrow, or life will go the same way again. ■

A short video of the ceremony (filmed and edited by your author) can be viewed here: <https://tinyurl.com/4kkjuvxn>



The site of the Ez-Chaim Synagogue

HOSPITAL CHAPLAINCY: BRINGING COMFORT AND CARE TO PATIENTS



When in hospital, many patients will be visited by friends, family or people from their community; however, not everyone has that support or their family and friends do not live nearby. Sometimes it is also helpful to speak to someone outside the family. Jewish Visiting is a cross-communal initiative organised by the United Synagogue Chesed Department, whereby we have a team of chaplains and volunteers who aim to visit anyone Jewish in hospital who would like a visitor. We cover most of the hospitals within London and the Home Counties.

Sharon Daniels, Head of Chesed and Volunteering, explains, “Hospital chaplaincy can play a vital role in supporting patients and their families during some of life’s most challenging moments. A visit from a chaplain or one of our trained volunteers can bring spiritual comfort, a sense of connection, and a reminder that they are not alone. Jewish Visiting has been providing this essential service across Greater London and surrounding areas since 1875.

Chaplains and trained visitors offer more than just company. They provide emotional and pastoral support, help meet religious and cultural needs, and ensure that the hospital staff are aware of any specific Jewish requirements that may affect the patient’s care. In addition to visiting

patients, chaplains are also available to support their relatives and hospital staff who may need someone to talk to.

Visits are made regularly in hospitals with many Jewish patients, and on an “on-call” basis where Jewish patients are less frequent. A timely visit can make a big difference—Jewish tradition teaches that visiting the sick alleviates a sixtieth of their illness, as mentioned in the Talmud. It is also important to pray with the patient for *refuah sheleima* (speedy recovery) in appropriate circumstances.

In many hospitals where there are larger Jewish communities you will also find Shabbat rooms or trolleys stocked with a range of kosher items, such as grape juice and snacks, available for Jewish staff, patients and their visitors. Chaplains and volunteers can help access these, helping patients observe Shabbat even while in the hospital.

We are part of the multi-faith chaplaincy teams in hospitals, supporting one another and ensuring patients’ religious, spiritual and cultural needs are met as part of their care.

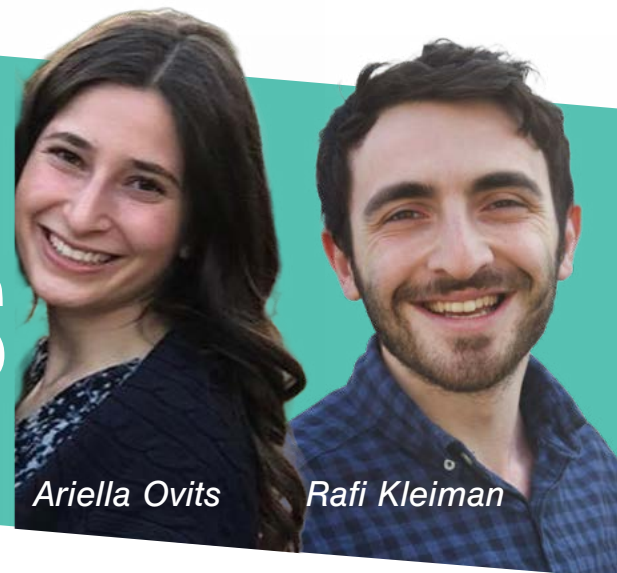
“

A visit from a chaplain or one of our trained volunteers can bring spiritual comfort, a sense of connection, and a reminder that they are not alone.

Rooted in the mitzvah of *Bikur Cholim*, visiting the sick, this act of kindness goes back to the example of Abraham in the Torah and continues to be a cornerstone of Jewish values. If you know someone in hospital who would appreciate a visit, or if you think you could be part of our dedicated team we’d love to hear from you on info@jvisit.org.uk. Help us bring comfort, compassion and connection to Jewish patients when they need it most. ■



MAGEN MINIS & MAGEN MAXIS



Ariella Ovits

Rafi Kleiman

Looking back at the last 12 months of Magen Minis and Maxis children's services and programmes, we can be proud and joyful of all that our youngsters have engaged in over that time.

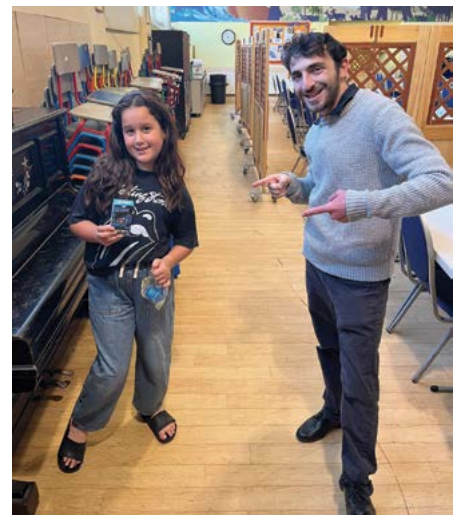
In addition to the weekly Shabbat morning services, there have been several highlights over the year. These range from our Sukkah Crawl, Purim Fancy Dress Parade and special (pre) Tikkun Leil Shavuot activities for primary school aged children. Magen Medals have been a particularly exciting addition to the year, with shul congregants often hearing a familiar clanging sound coming from the much-adored light blue tokens earned by our youngsters during the post-davening kiddush. These hard-earned medals have led to children winning prizes at the seasonal Magen Market, with those tokens being redeemed for all delightful things spanning Hebrew Bananagrams to cherished Magen David and Chai necklaces.

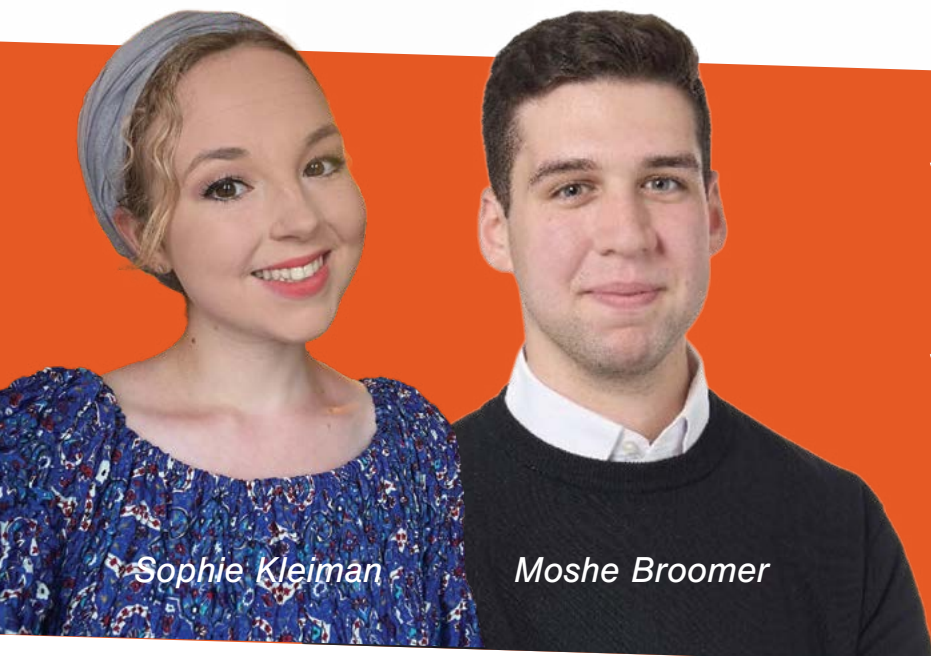
We are so grateful to all the support given to us from parents and adult volunteers within the shul – who have consistently brought their little ones to our services and assisted in the ever so out-of-the-box, novel ideas we have had.

This leads us to mention Horim V'Yeladim, our popular Motzei Shabbat parent and child learning programme, which will be continuing over the winter months, and the addition of more Magen Medal challenges and educational enrichments in the weeks and months ahead.

Here's to another wonderful year of children's learning, engagement and love of Judaism at Magen Avot! ■

Rafi & Ariella





Sophie Kleiman

Moshe Broomer

YOUR Y@MA

By Sophie Kleiman

The past year at Y@MA has been full of twists and turns, events, amazing discussions, sushi and even a holiday...

I am privileged to be entering my fifth year in the job with the most wonderful extended team, including new youth director Moshe Broomer. We are delighted to have him on board and are looking forward to his fresh ideas, inspiration and experience as a madrich. Thanks must also be given to Aviya Solomon, who joined us briefly at the end of last year before returning home to Australia. She brought with her a wealth of knowledge and hadracha experience from her Bnei Akiva communal roles 'Down Under'.

As I turn back to look at a few highlights from our last year, I will touch upon a few events run from September until the summer. Shira Neville sadly left to make aliyah in October 2024 after running the younger cohort for two years. We are so grateful for the energy, enthusiasm and love for Torah and the land of Israel imparted to every child she interacted with in this time.

The past year began with a 'simanim seuda' on Rosh Hashanah afternoon as we tasted, explored and played some crazy (and inventive) simanim-related games before diving into some deep discussions surrounding the day itself. We also experienced our yearly Sukkah crawl – now running in 'reverse order' to Magen Avot's wonderful children's programming – ice skating for Chanukah, and our second homeless drive delivering to those in need.

We enjoyed an incredible Shabbat lunch at the Golkers' in November, filled with ruach and games and a buzzing Q&A with Rabbi Golker on Tikkun Leil Shavuot – our classroom was packed with Y@MA members eager to learn and question their

Judaism into the night. (The ice cream may also have helped...) Our teens also helped to create paper flower decorations to adorn the hall for Shavuot, ran stalls and helped at our mega Magen Avot 10-year anniversary family fun day and enjoyed a Yom Tov Pesach games afternoon.

Our absolute highlight of the year has got to be our Brighton trip in March – with huge thanks to Rabbi Golker for putting this project together. Along with South Hampstead, we enjoyed a full Shabbaton by the seaside (only one member was brave enough to actually get into the sea in March weather... you know who you are...) with ruach, singing, friendships made and a generally amazing atmosphere. It was truly something to remember. We even ran a 'Y@MA session' straight after shul, and our children are clamouring for another trip.

From discussions about Israel and middot to a three-week Rabbi Sacks focused course on Jewish identity to playing 'The Traitors', Parasha summaries, debates and more, Y@MA aims to challenge our teens to think about their actions deeply – to be proud of the Jewish life they have created, to strengthen their connections and above all, to allow them to be themselves in a warm, dynamic and homely environment.

I have loved running this group and feel lucky to be interacting with the best group of teens around. Moshe and I are extremely excited about the year to come and are ready to kick-start another year of growth and fun.

We appreciate all the help we can get from parents, and would love for you to be in touch with any ideas, offers to host or otherwise. ■

SHANA TOVA!

Introducing Our New Y@MA Youth Director Moshe Broomer

Moshe recently joined Magen Avot as one of the Youth Directors with Sophie Kleiman.

Here he introduces himself:

"I went to JFS for high school, where I completed my GCSEs and A-Levels. After that I spent two years in Israel studying at Yeshivat Reishit in Beit Shemesh. I've recently returned to London and am now doing an apprenticeship in Business Studies, working in central London as part of the programme."

"I feel very honoured to be joining Magen Avot as one of your new Youth Directors, running Y@MA alongside Sophie. From my very first week here I've felt so warmly welcomed by the community and I'm excited to be part of it."

"Sophie and I are really looking forward to the year ahead. We have lots of ideas and plans for Y@MA, including activities for the Yamim Noraim and other chagim, charity projects, trips and plenty of fun events to bring everyone together."

"Our hope is that Y@MA will be a place where all young people feel included, inspired and excited to take part. Please do come and say hello – I'd love to meet as many of you as possible and I'm always happy to hear ideas and suggestions from both parents and youth." ■



Musical Havdala before the packing of the care packages



Y@MA'S MAGEN AVOT ELUL HOMELESS DRIVE

Magen Avot was proud to run the Elul Homeless Drive, collecting goods for homeless people across London. This special initiative was led by our Youth at Magen Avot (Y@MA) Programme, who packed and prepared care packages to be distributed locally. Beginning with a moving Musical Havdalah, the evening brought together youth, families, and community spirit, creating a powerful Kiddush Hashem and a meaningful way to prepare for the Yomim Noraim



Packing the care packages



Out and about doing a Kiddush Hashem



MAGEN AVOT 10TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS Community Fun Day



MAGEN
AV10T 2015
2025



Valerie and I have recently been blessed to celebrate some wonderful family semachot in Israel but regrettably, together with thousands of others, we have not yet been able to return home. We were keenly looking forward to this very special Magen Avot Shabbat and are so sorry not to be with you. We wish you all a hearty mazal tov and continued beracha vehatzlacha in all your sacred endeavours.

In Mizmor shir leyom haShabbat, a description is given of messianic times through the prism of music. The pasuk refers to “alei assor” – a ten-stringed instrument. The Zohar tells us that music is the language of the soul. The Sefat Emet adds that in our times we are limited to the octave of eight notes. In the time of geulah we will be blessed to have what we might call a ‘dectave’, a broader range of 10 notes. A ten-stringed instrument therefore implies that at the time of redemption we will reach unparalleled musical heights which will enhance our spirituality in a remarkable manner.

For us today, the ‘alei asor’ represents the past 10 years of Magen Avot’s extraordinary accomplishment. The kehilla has exceeded all expectations in every area of communal endeavour. Under the outstanding leadership of Rabbi and Rebbetzen Kenigsberg, followed now by Rabbi and Rebbetzen Golker, together with truly wonderful lay leaders in every field of community engagement, Magen Avot, within a very short period of time, has become an outstanding model of excellence for all other United Synagogue communities to follow.

May the incredible Magen Avot community continue always to go mechayil el chayil.

Chief Rabbi Sir Ephraim Mirvis KBE



I was truly looking forward to spending this special Shabbat with you all. Unfortunately, as you know, the current situation here in Israel means that I can't be there in person, and so we'll have to make do with a written message. But even from afar, I want to say Mazal Tov on this incredible milestone.

Ten years of a kehilla is a wonderful achievement. Ten years of the warmth, sincerity, the special Tefillah, and Torah that define Magen Avot.

There are so many amazing things about this community and its people, and I will always look back fondly on my time here.

It's no coincidence that you're celebrating this milestone on Parshat Shelach. This parsha teaches us about different perspectives: the meraglim who were fearful and hesitant, and Yehoshua and Calev who saw the goodness of the land and held on to their faith and optimism.

In many ways, Magen Avot embodies that same spirit – looking beyond challenges and always focusing on the positive, on the promise of a bright future. Even though we're far apart right now, we feel your support, your prayers, and your connection deeply here in Israel.

Wishing everyone a wonderful Shabbat and looking forward to the day we can be together again soon. Mazal Tov, and may we all continue to share in smachot and know only Besorot Tovot for all of Am Yisrael.

Rabbi Joel Kenigsberg

ON POETRY, MENTORSHIP, AND VULNERABILITY

Interview with Eve Grubin-Brookes

In her much anticipated second full-length collection of poems, Eve Grubin navigates wild waters. The press release for the book says that she crosses these waters in a 'boat of letters with poems which narrate a daughter in mourning for her mother in adulthood's half-light; a wife in the middle of life's existential marathon; a mother raising two children in the terrifying present; an American living in London; a Jewish woman following religious tradition in what can feel like a faithless world.'

Eve explained to HaMagen details of her thought processes:

"The American poet Stanley Kunitz (1905-2006) who was an important mentor to several generations of poets said, 'Poets need mentors the way children need parents.' This concept has always been very important to me as I grew as a poet." She went on to say, 'I am grateful to the poets I studied with and also to every poem I have ever read or heard read or recited. Every song, every story, every lullaby, and nursery rhyme. Every piece of text. Everything. All have nurtured me and taken me to this moment. My writing is intimately intertwined with my reading, and I have received all poetic strategies from poems or other writings I have read.'

While studying poetry in New York, Eve was influenced by a number of poets in addition to Kunitz. Poets such as Marie Howe and Jean Valentine were also important teachers and influences. She said that these poets focus, in their work and in their teachings, on 'qualities such as vulnerability, not knowing, acknowledging mortality, and accepting one's faults.' And she added, 'in my new collection of poems, *Boat of Letters*, I celebrate, or at least accept, imperfection, and even praise giving up.' Eve shared this poem with us:

Giving Up

I've been thinking about giving up.

*When something seems impossible
do I have to complete it?*

Let the fault be.

*I can't seem to slide
across the tennis court--I never learned
how to skim the surface
without falling. When writing a poem
I often fail, not following a thread
to its finishing point,
letting the poem remain almost great.*

*I can't get my children to stop eating
Doritos
or learn to tie their shoes
or turn off the lights when they leave a
room.*

*Sometimes there is no solution to a
problem.*

*A struggle, dormant in marriage,
can reappear years later
in another form.*

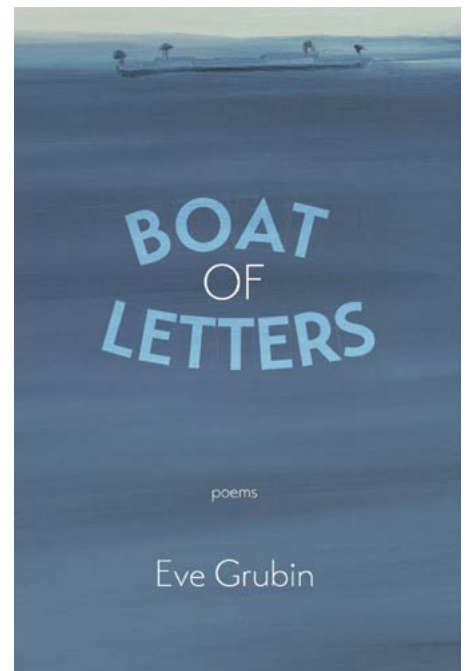
In the forward to **The Book of Love** Maimonides's translator writes that Hebrew words assimilated into English are neither translated nor italicized.

This leads to inconsistencies in the translation. Holiday names, for example, passed into English are cited in that language. "Rosh Hashana" is Hebrew, yet "Day of Atonement" is English.

He accepts, "There seems to be no good way of solving this problem."

This last sentence is followed by white space, letting the problem bloom, unsolved.

After sharing this poem with us, Eve quoted Kunitz: 'Poets today can hope to do precisely what poets have always done, that is, tell the story of the human adventure, express what it feels like to be



alive in this particular time, this particular place.'

Eve said, 'I am honoured to have the opportunity to add my words to the story of the human adventure.' ■

Note: Dr Grubin is Lecturer at NYU London, an affiliate of New York University, and she is Tutor at The Poetry School at Somerset House, Strand. Her published works include:

Boat of Letters, Four Way Books

Grief Dialogue, Rack Press

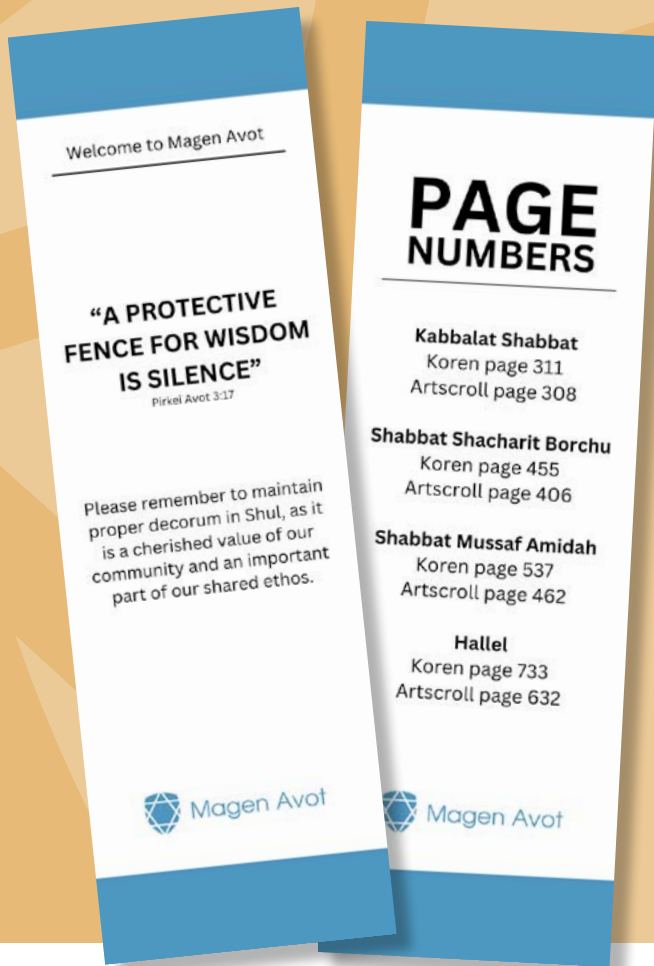
The House of Our First Loving, Rack Press

Morning Prayer, Sheep Meadow Press

More information about Eve's work can be found at: evegrubin.com

OUR NEW BOOKMARKS

In 2015, when Magen Avot began, we produced bookmarks promoting our ethos of maintaining proper decorum in Shul. Though they disappeared over time, our commitment to this standard has remained strong, and today, Magen Avot enjoys unparalleled decorum. Recently, we reinstated these bookmarks to reinforce this ethos and provide a quick guide to Shabbat page numbers, something members had requested. We hope these bookmarks will become a staple in Shul, serving as both a reminder of our values and a helpful companion for attendees over Shabbat. Look out for them and help us uphold our cherished atmosphere.



לשנה טובה תכתב ותחתם

Wishing our wonderful Magen Avot community a happy, healthy and successful year. We look forward to seeing our Shul continue to thrive and grow. Grateful thanks to Rabbi and Rebbetzin Golker, the Executive and Council for all their hard work.

Karina, Ashley, Joey and Minna Katz

SAVING JEWISH COMMUNITIES OPERATION MOSES

By Linda Wolfe

The Magen Avot Yom Yerushalayim Barbecue held in May – thanks to the wonderful hospitality of Anouk and Darren Abrahams – was a truly happy event. The guest speaker from the Israeli Embassy gave us a fascinating insight into Operation Moses, the rescue of Ethiopian Jewry. He illustrated his talk with contemporary newsreels from the aircraft, and his excellent presentation made a deep impression on us with new insights into this amazing rescue of a Jewish community in severe distress. This made me reflect and recall memories of past efforts which brought threatened Jewish communities to safety.

The miracle of the rescue of the entire Ethiopian Jewish community to Israel was kept as secret as possible. The community had been under attack and were suffering like other Ethiopians from the effects of the civil war and hunger, and after walking for many days across barren deserts, several thousand Jews had gathered over the border in Sudan. For every rescued Jew, the Israeli government paid a secret form of “ransom” to the Sudanese government, who were most reluctant for their fellow Arab and Muslim nations to know that they were dealing with Israel, let alone receiving Israeli money. In fact, when the airlift became known in January 1985, Sudan was pressured by neighbouring Arab countries to discontinue the airlift, and 1,000 Jews remained behind until they could be rescued later in later missions, Operation Joshua and Operation Solomon.

The Guinness Book of World Records notes that the greatest number of passengers ever carried by a commercial airliner is 1,088 or thereabouts (there are conflicting reports of the final count, as some say 1,122), by an El Al Boeing 747 during Operation Solomon, which started

on 24 May 1991. This figure included two babies born on the flight. The operation to evacuate the Ethiopian Jews continued nonstop for 36 hours, involving a total of 34 El Al jumbo jets and Hercules C-130s – with seats removed to accommodate the maximum number of passengers.

My husband John and I knew nothing of Operation Moses at that time. However, everything changed when we spent a month in Israel as volunteers in the Yemin Orde Dental Clinic. Youth Aliyah had established several residential schools in Eretz Yisrael for lone Jewish children whose parents could not care for them. The children were brought by bus to Yemin Orde for dental treatment and dental health education.

We arrived at Yemin Orde the day before school started. We went to the chadar ochel for what we expected to be supper with the school staff, and were quite amazed to encounter 49 beautiful children, all male, all Ethiopian, with huge enquiring eyes, waiting patiently for our arrival so that we could all start our meal. Our host, Pesach Riffkin, explained about the covert Operation Moses to bring as many Ethiopian Jews as possible to Israel before the door slammed shut, and these children had all been sent to safety in Israel while the opportunity was there; the Sudanese authorities refused to allow the parents to accompany their children.

What an effect that had upon us! The children were delightful. Their Ivrit was limited but improving daily, and they were so quiet and gentle. Each one was deeply religious and they davened avidly and musically; we were delighted to enjoy this several times a day in the school shul. They were optimistic that their families would join them soon; they were simple souls who were so polite – a joy and example to us all.

Prior to Operation Moses, Russian and Soviet Pact Jews began to make aliyah before the collapse of the Soviet Union, but after glasnost the numbers grew increasingly. In the early 1990s about one million Russian Jews fled the Soviet Union to Israel. We were fortunate that on one of our visits to Israel we were asked to assist in meeting and greeting a flight of Soviet Jews at Ben Gurion Airport. There were chairs set up in the hall, theatre-style, and trestle tables round the edges of the room laden with Russian-style food and

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The Guinness Book of World Records notes that the greatest number of passengers ever carried by a commercial airliner is 1,088 or thereabouts, by an El Al Boeing 747 during Operation Solomon



drink, and a beautiful antique samovar. There was a huge dot matrix display in Cyrillic characters which apparently gave messages welcoming the new olim and explaining what was going to be happening to them.

The flight we met landed at 3.30 am and shortly afterwards these exhausted and totally bewildered people began to filter into the hall. Each one was pale grey from top to toe. They were young, old, and they had grey hats, grey coats, grey skin tones, and all carried grey plastic shopping bags. They looked at us with total suspicion and hostility; these poor people had obviously suffered so much. A Russian-speaking official explained that they were now welcome as Israeli citizens, and they should help themselves to food and drink and collect their beautiful new passports waiting for distribution. Most sat in total silence, and would not engage with us despite our best efforts. Eventually some of them began to lighten after the first brave person went to help himself to a piece of cake.

Another community saved from disaster was the Jewish Sarajevo community during the Bosnian war. The siege of Sarajevo lasted from 5 April 1992 to 29 February 1996, and is the longest siege in modern warfare. World Jewish Relief approached the British authorities, who were generous in agreeing to grant asylum status to any Jews who wished to leave the war zone and who could be brought safely to the UK.

WJR organised coaches which took tinned food, blankets, batteries and other

essentials to the Jews in Sarajevo, and anyone who wished to leave could hitch a lift back to the UK on the empty coach. We made friends with some of these wonderful people, and they have made happy lives and significant contributions to our society.

There is one more miracle of a saved Jewish community about which I have learned a great deal, and this is still largely unknown – the Jews of Syria. John and I met Judy Feld Carr at a conference in Toronto. Judy was awarded the Israel President's Award of Distinction in 2012, by Shimon Peres.

She and her husband Dr Ronald Feld became aware of the plight of Syrian Jewry in the early 1970s. The community lived in ghettos completely isolated from the outside world, and were banned from emigrating and under constant surveillance by the Mukhabarat secret police. They needed permission to travel more than three miles. Many who tried to escape were shot and killed at the border, so Judy made it her life's work to save as many as possible. She raised funds and established a clandestine connection with Rabbi Ibrahim Hamra, the then Chief Rabbi of Syria, and other important people in the community. Coded letters were sent and parcels, mainly containing religious articles, were smuggled into the Syrian community.

Judy would not elaborate too much on her methods, but she did tell us that she had to raise huge funds for bribes to border officials and others who were sympathetic to the plight of the Jewish

community. People were rescued in small groups, but eventually the danger to Syrian citizens became too great as the police and security forces began to realise what was happening. The only way to continue to rescue Jews was the formation of a network of very brave people who entered Syria via neighbouring countries as the Syria border with Israel was heavily monitored. Eventually Judy herself began to make trips to Syria dressed as a religious Muslim woman robed in black from head to toe. People were smuggled out somehow in small groups, at huge risk to all their lives.

At last, in 1992, the Syrian government decreed that the remainder of the Jewish community could leave, provided that they did not make aliyah. Judy was at the forefront of the arrangements to facilitate the departure of the community while the door remained open. Three thousand, two hundred twenty-eight Jews were brought from Syria and safely made new lives in many places but mainly in Israel and North America.

Judy is known as 'Mrs Judy in Canada' by the Syrian Jewish community. Many never learned her full name, such was the secrecy required to protect everyone involved in this rescue and ensure that the lines of communication and transport were maintained. This episode has been described as 'the best-kept secret in the Jewish world.'

Is the rescue of Jewish communities in the Geulah pertinent to us in the United Kingdom now?

Jewish life in the UK has changed dramatically in a very short space of time. I am troubled, confused and nervous. I love Britain and am grateful for the haven they gave to my grandparents, but am I safe and happy here now? When did Jews facing persecution in the past feel that the time had arrived to run away? Are British Jews really in so much danger now that we should think of aliyah, like those Ethiopians who were the subject of the Yom Yerushalaim event?

Let us hope and pray that the difficulties we face now will diminish and that we can revert to the situation where British Jews can live their lives in an uninhibited yet respectful way, and that we will not be like these other communities who required rescue in the face of persecution and threats to their lives. As we say in the weekday Amidah: תַּקַּע בְּשׁוּפָר גָּדוֹל לְחֵרֻתָּנוּ, וְשֵׂא נֶס לְקִבְצֵי גְלִיזְתֵּינוּ, וְקַבְּצֵנוּ יְחִיד מֵאֲרָבַע כְּנָפוֹת – הָאֶרֶץ לְאֶרְצֵנוּ – but may we recite this prayer from secure and happy homes wherever we find ourselves. ■

THE JEWISH CODEBREAKERS OF WORLD WAR II

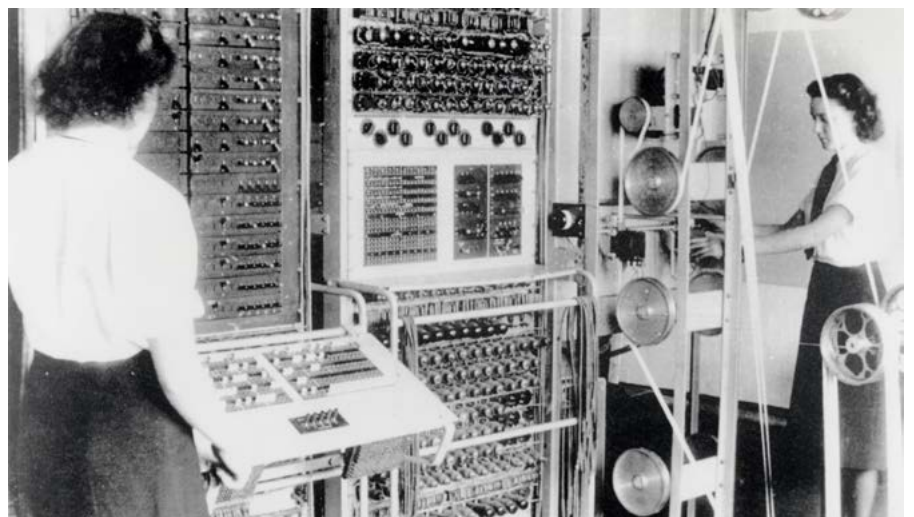
By Julian Pollard



The Enigma Machine



Around 8,000 people worked at Bletchley Park during the war, including over 200 Jewish codebreakers. Although Jews made up less than 0.5% of the UK population



The Colossus computer at Bletchley Park, Buckinghamshire, England, c. 1943.

From Hollywood films such as “Enigma” we know many unsung heroes working at Bletchley Park, just north of London, contributed to the Allies’ victory in World War II. Their work was strictly classified and strict secrecy was maintained – often taken to their grave. With the passage of time, we are slowly learning more about the

contribution of Jews at Bletchley Park in winning the war by deciphering enemy communications, which proved crucial to shortening the war and saving lives. These men and women were sworn to secrecy, so their stories are only now coming to light

Around 8,000 people worked at Bletchley Park during the war, including over 200 Jewish codebreakers. Although

Jews made up less than 0.5% of the UK population, their contribution to Bletchley's efforts was substantial.

The Jewish history of Bletchley Park pre-dates its now well-known wartime activities, as the Mansion at the heart of the Bletchley Park had been the home of Sir Herbert Leon, a wealthy Jewish stockbroker, MP and atheist, and Lady Fanny Leon.

The recruits came from a variety of social and religious backgrounds and were selected on ability and education, though many were recruited directly from Oxford and Cambridge Universities. Jewish recruits often had well-developed linguistic skills, especially in Oriental languages and German. Others had ability in mathematics, analysis and chess

Many of the Jewish decoders at Bletchley Park had family connections with Germany and other European countries overrun by the Nazis, and knew the threat Hitler posed to their relatives and other Jews; many of their families or relatives were murdered. Some of the decoders read distressing messages relating to Hitler's attempted genocide of the Jews, such as the transport of the Jews from Rhodes in 1944 "for the final solution" and the last futile attempt of Jews to flee to Palestine in 1942, with the torpedoing of the Struma and the loss of 769 Romanian lives, a disaster covered up by both the British and Turkish authorities. However, there is no doubt that the work at Bletchley Park not only shortened the war but saved Jewish lives as well.

There was no organised Jewish religious life on site – before the war there had only been one Jewish family in town. During the war three very orthodox Jewish evacuee families formed a tiny informal congregation (a shtetel), which was used by some Jews from Bletchley Park. Most Jews went to Oxford or London for religious services, or to their homes. However, many Jews kept kosher by eating vegetarian food as an alternative, which was not a problem, and at least one took each Saturday off for the Jewish Sabbath. While some anti-Semitism was evident, and attempts were sometimes made to block recruitment of Jews, it does not seem to have been universal.

Key Jewish Staff

Jewish staff who played key roles at Bletchley, included Professor Maxwell Newman (1897-1984), who was the architect of the Colossus computer, the world's first computer. Irving John Good



Working conditions were cramped, cold, damp and basic

aka Jack Good (originally Isidore Jacob Gudak) was Alan Turing's chief statistical assistant, who used statistics to work out probable meanings in messages that had yet to be fully decoded. He also found a method of speeding up the Colossus computer and was an inventor of the modern computer.

The Enigma

Among Bletchley Park's team achievements was breaking the Enigma-encoded messages. Enigma was a typewriter-like machine that automatically encoded a message as it was entered by the typist. It was extensively used by the Germans during World War II.

Typical is the story of **Irving John (Jack) Good, FRS**, who was a mathematics scholar at Jesus College, Cambridge. He worked on Enigma and Tunny as a crypto analyst in Hut 8 under the great Turing, breaking the German Naval Enigma codes; as Turing's main statistical assistant, he was a main player in the game. He earned Turing's undying respect. His speciality was in weighing the probability of the accuracy of a word or words in a message that was not quite decoded. He in fact devised a method which greatly speeded the resolving of such problems

Another outstanding Jewish mathematician at Bletchley Park was **Professor Maxwell Herman Alexander Newman FRS** (formerly Neumann), who resolved to build a machine that would break the codes.

Elected as a Fellow of the Royal Society



in 1939 he had already established his reputation in theoretical mathematics at Cambridge and Princeton and it was to him that Turing presented

his first papers on a hypothetical programmable computing machine in 1937.

By May 1943, Newman and his team built what became known as the Colossus, the predecessor of the modern computer. It is Newman who is credited with breaking the Lorenz code.

Newman was born in February 1897 in Chelsea, he served in World War 1 and was a Cambridge mathematician from St John's College. He was one of Turing's lecturers as a student. After the war he returned to academia at Manchester University and died in 1984 in Cambridge.

Harry Golombek was born in London in March 1911, the son of a Polish Jewish immigrant greengrocer. He attended Wilson's Grammar school in Camberwell and studied philology at King's College London, becoming an international chess champion in the process.

At the outbreak of war he joined the Royal Artillery, but because of his maths and analytical skills he was recruited to Bletchley Park. Here, he often played chess with Turing, and it was Golombek who broke the Abwehr code used by the enemy in Turkey. After the war, he became the chess correspondent for The Times between 1945 and 1985 and was

a prolific writer on the game. He died in January 1995.



Dame Miriam Louisa Rothschild-Lane was born 5th August 1908, daughter of a Hungarian Jewish aristocrat, Roszika Wertheimstein, and a British Jewish

banker, Nathaniel Charles Rothschild.

Educated informally but thoroughly at home on the family Ashton Wold estate near Peterborough, and at the family's Tring Museums, she only much later in life studied formally at Chelsea Polytechnic (zoology) and Bedford College London (literature), but her scholarly works on zoology ever since have brought her numerous honorary doctorates and degrees.

Rothschild-Lane spent two years at Bletchley Park after being interviewed and headhunted like many other scientists at the time. (She had been working on scientific war research in Plymouth.) She mostly worked night shifts translating German coded messages in the Naval Section. She disliked it intensely. Bound by her oath of secrecy, she would say little about the precise nature of her work. She lived in a flat at Mentmore towers – a very grand country mansion – given her by a Rothschild relative, Lord Roseberry, and would commute in her car to Bletchley Park. He also gave her a housekeeper for the duration, so hers was a somewhat privileged status so far as accommodation was concerned.

Whilst at Bletchley Park she met and married a distinguished and wounded refugee Jewish/British commando, later Capt. George Lanyi aka Lane, MC.

All of Rothschild-Lane's mother's family were murdered in the Holocaust in Hungary. Post-war she carried out an enormous amount of scientific research in Israel, where she spent a lot of time, and the UK, publishing over 300 papers and nine books. She died in 2005, aged 96 years.



Walter George Ettinghausen (later Walter Eytan, director of the Israeli Foreign Ministry and Israel's ambassador to France) was born in 1910 in Munich, and

was in charge of the translator's group in the German Naval section, Hut 4. A scholar of German from St Paul's School and a Don at Queen's College Oxford, Ettinghausen had been called up in September 1940, having already been asked to do secret work when he was at university. He had been born in Germany but the Bletchley security people knew he and other Jews had a special stake in fighting Hitler.

Before it was possible to read Enigma, the teams could still guess at the meanings of some German ciphers and signals, enough to give warnings to the Navy that certain German battle ships, for example, were patrolling off Norway, and how to avoid or attack them. Often they could tell an urgent message by acronyms the Germans used such as SSD (*sehr sehr dringend* – “very, very urgent”). The messages were extremely significant and included U boat route plots, U boat supply ship locations, and movements of capital ships like the Bismarck. Ettinghausen and his team knew that thousands of lives depended on their work, especially during the Battle of the Atlantic. He said, “I knew the name of every U Boat Commander.” His team helped reroute convoys to avoid them. He also vividly recalled the last messages of the Bismarck, whose end he helped bring about in May 1941.

It was Ettinghausen who set up a Zionist Society at Bletchley, which quite a few Jews regularly attended on a Wednesday evening at the apartment of Joe Gillis. (He was a Sunderland born mathematician from Belfast University who later became a professor at the Weizmann Institute at Rehovot, near Tel Aviv. Among other things, Gillis broke the codes in which the Germans sent their weather reports, most important to our air forces campaign.)

On one poignant night, in early 1944, Ettinghausen's team intercepted a message from a German vessel in the Aegean, saying they were transporting Jews from Rhodes or Kos for Piraeus “zur Endlösung” (“for the final solution”); he had not heard this expression before but he wrote that he instinctively knew what it meant; he never forgot it and it left its mark on him till he died. It was thus indeed poetic justice when he was in charge of the Israeli Foreign Ministry years later, that it was he who initiated the original search for the notorious Nazi war criminal Adolph Eichmann, which culminated in Eichmann's capture by the Israeli Secret Service in 1960 in Argentina and his transport to, and trial in, Israel, leading to his execution in 1962.

One of the most memorable moments

came when the message about Hitler's death arrived in April 1945, from German Naval HQ. It was late at night and Ettinghausen was on duty. He decided to wire this one himself to the Admiralty and not use a WAAF assistant. It was a fitting end for a Jewish soldier at Bletchley to have been the first to see and relay such a message. Small wonder he devoted the rest of his life working for the defence of Israel.

Ettinghausen went to Israel in 1946 and was asked to set up a school to train staff for a foreign service for a new nation. He was involved during the siege of Jerusalem in the 1948 War of Independence, and at Lausanne in 1949 headed the Israeli delegation and signed the first agreement between Israel and an Arab country, Egypt. Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett asked him to become director of the Foreign Ministry, which he did for 11 years before becoming ambassador to France.



Peter Benenson (born Peter James Henry Solomon; 31 July 1921-25 February 2005) worked as a cryptographer at BP. He became a barrister, human

rights activist and the founder of the human rights group Amnesty International, a global movement of more than 10 million people, currently, and in over 150 countries and territories who campaign to end abuses on human rights and to secure the release of political prisoners.

To conclude on a slightly personal note:

A cousin of my later father also worked at Bletchley Park, **Sgt. Hyam Zundell Maccoby** was born in Sunderland in 1924, the son of Ephraim Myer Maccoby, a maths teacher and grandson of rabbis. From Bede Grammar School he went to Balliol and read classics but after a short time volunteered to join the army to fight the Nazis. Short in stature, he was sent to Catterick as a Royal Signaller and in 1942 was sent to Bletchley Park, where he worked mainly on the night shifts translating decoded messages for despatch. He spoke little to his family about his work there. After the war he held several university academic posts, latterly as professor of Jewish studies at Leeds, and was a prolific author on biblical subjects. He died in May 2004.

I am indebted to Martin Sugarman of AJEX for much of the research into this subject. ■

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THE DIVINE WOOD AND LESS DIVINE TREES – MEANINGLESS PRAYERS A VIEW FROM TENACH

By Elkan Adler

Ever since July/Tamuz our halakhic calendar has been sensitising us to the time of year, our place in history and asking us to take stock. This translated into the symbolism of increasing mourning culminating in the horror of Tisha B'Av at the end of the Three week period and then progressing through the Summer via a bright pitstop at Tu b'Av, into the soul searching of, firstly, Ellul and now into an intense period of solemn celebration of the world and life, with the promise of self betterment and hope for the future. The Torah, Chazal and our traditions have given us rites, rituals, Kinot, Selichos, extra Psalms, Shofar blasts, tunes and prayers to help us shift through these times, emotions and aspirations, culminating in the Teshuva process of these days via the huge canon of additional liturgy of Rosh Hashonoh and Yom Kippur.

During the process of the Three Weeks, we are asked to become particularly aware of the loss of our Beis Hamikdash – our Temple, an aspect of which, is our inability to offer the Korbonos/sacrifices which the Torah requires, which is felt most keenly on Yom Kippur. Despite having to contend with the physical loss and calamitous suffering of the destruction, our leaders instituted an authentic “replacement” for the Avodah/the Temple Service. The Prophet Yechezkel

in Babylonian exile talks of the “Mikdash Me’at” (the small sanctuary) which has become understood as a reference to our Synagogues and Chazal have temporarily established our prayers in place of the Korbonos. For us now, Prayers are the Korbonos and the Shul is the Beis Hamikdash.

It is a mainstay of our belief that the Tenach speaks not only within its historical context but also for the contemporary world. Saying that, of course, no modern orthodox view can limit itself to the Tenach. Doing so would sideline the Torah she b'al peh (the oral Tradition), Chazal and the great Mesorah of thought which has developed since the Sanhedrin canonised the Tenach. However over recent centuries, classic Orthodox education has primarily focussed on areas other than the Tenach (with the exception of the weekly Parsha). It's a study for another time what are the historical, cultural and political reasons that created this situation but with the blossoming of a religious Zionist community in Israel, there has been a re-engagement with the Tenach to understand in particular the pshat¹ as championed by many Rishonim (medieval commentators) before moving on to other levels of exegesis. Here I focus on the ethical stance written into

¹ The reading which is closest to the text as written by the prophet or God directly

ונתנה תקף
קדשת
היום. כי הוא
נורא ואיום.
ובו תנשא
מלכותך. ויכון
בחסד כסאך.
ותשב עליו
באמת. אמת
כי אתה הוא
דין ומוכיח
ויודע ועד.
וכותב וחותם
וסופר ומונה.
ותזכר כל
הנשכחות.

our foundational texts which forms the backbone to our Judaism.

Rites done wrong

One of the things which struck me when I started serious study of Tenach is the radical attitude adopted by a number of the Nevi'im (Prophets) towards the Temple service, the Korbonos and religious rites, driven by the concern that the very rituals which are supposed to inspire us, when thoughtlessly mistreated, lose all meaning and can act as a "religious" screen to unethical behaviour.

Indeed, our Mesorah has highlighted some of these jarring passages in our Haftorahs that focus on this danger, especially around this time of the year. A prime example is the Haftorah for Shabbes Chazon from Yeshayahu², on the Shabbes immediately preceding Tisha b'Av when we mourn in the rawest fashion the loss of the Beis Hamikdosh:

Hear the word of God, You chieftains of Sodom; Give ear to our God's teaching, You people of Amorah! "What need have I of all your sacrifices?" Says God. "... Bring no more empty gifts, the incense is offensive to Me. Rosh Chodesh and Shabbes, the Yom Tovs you proclaim – I can't stand these sins and gatherings, Proclaiming of solemnities, Assemblies with iniquity I cannot abide... And when you lift up your hands, I will turn My eyes away from you; Though you pray at length, I will not listen... Stop doing evil; Learn to do good, seek justice, correct what is cruel, do justice for orphans, fight the widow's cause... Zion shall be redeemed through justice and those that return to her with righteousness.

There is of course no suggestion of a rejection of sacrifices nor the rites but there is a "contextualisation of worship that defines acceptable offerings as those accompanied by a broken spirit, purchased with honest gains and offered by members of a moral society whose values are righteous and just."³

Albeit not a Haftorah but on the topic of confusing ritual objects for meaning, is the very painful picture painted in Chapter 4 of the book of Shmuel I. Here Am Yisroel go into doomed battle against the Pelishtim, leading with the Oron (Ark of the Covenant), sure that this Holy thing would conjure some type of magic to bring victory and force Hashem's hand, regardless of their own conduct. They fail

and the Pelishtim seize the Oron. This dismal approach is matched perhaps only by the description of Eli, the aged Cohen Gadol leader whose response to the news of defeat indicates that the loss of the Oron was more important to him than the battle losses including the death of his own sons! This leader's fixation on a box, an ark – even when it is the Ark – a Holy object, part of a rite and ritual which is supposed to inspire us to a higher purpose, becoming perverted to take a meaning of its own, trumping even the value of human life, is soaked in bitter irony.

Consider also, the poignant Haftorah for Yom Kippur, again from Yeshayahu⁴, where the Novi criticises not only the Korbonos but the meaninglessness of fasts if they neither trigger a genuine attitude change nor a move to create a society based on amongst other things, social justice:

To be sure, they seek Me day after day, Eager to learn My ways. Like a nation that does what is right and never abandoned its God's justice, They ask Me for the right way, They say being close to God is all that interests them. "Why, when we fasted, did You not see? When we starved our bodies, did You pay no heed?" Because even on your fast day You see to your business and oppress all your labourers!... Is such the fast I desire, a day for people to starve their bodies? Is it bowing the head like a bulrush and lying in sackcloth and ashes? Do you call that a fast, a day when God is favourable? No, this is the fast I desire: To loosen the bindings of evil, break the slavery chain, to let the oppressed go free; to break off every yoke. It is to share your bread with the hungry and to take the wretched poor into your home; when you see the naked, to clothe them and not to ignore your own kin... If you banish the yoke from your midst, The menacing hand, and evil speech, And you offer your compassion to the hungry And satisfy the famished creature—Then shall your light shine in darkness and your gloom shall be like noonday."

Also Amos prophesying to the Northern Kingdom calling out the ironic picture of people too "religious" to work on Shabbes (and Rosh Chodesh – formerly treated as a Yom Tov), but looking forward to nightfall so that they can get back to their regular activities which result in the oppression of the weak.⁵ Missing the Divine wood for the trees with such a disastrous consequence:

² Yishayahu 1:10–18, 27

³ To quote my teacher R' Yitzchak Etshalom in his monumental work on the Book of Amos (Koren 2025)

⁴ 58: 2–14

⁵ 8:4–6

“
Hashem doesn't need to be fed with our sacrifices. He doesn't have His mind changed by our prayers. Those are Pagan beliefs. Hashem lacks nothing and won't be bribed or nagged into submission but He does instruct us to follow an ethical path and create a society of social justice – Chesed Tzedokoh and Mishpot.

Listen to this, you who devour the needy, annihilating the poor of the land, saying, "If only the new moon were over, so that we could sell grain; the Sabbath, so that we could offer wheat for sale, using an ephah that is too small, and a shekel that is too big, tilting a dishonest scale, and selling grain refuse as grain! We will buy the poor for silver, the needy for a pair of shoes.

Those left after the destruction of the Northern Kingdom in the shrunken Kingdom of Yehuda, seem to have held on to the belief that as the Beis Hamikdosh in Jerusalem was the "House of God" it would never be destroyed – regardless. Listen to Hashem's instruction to Yirmiyahu⁶:

"This is what Hashem God of Hosts, the God of Israel says: Mend your ways and your actions, and I will let you dwell in this place. Don't put your trust in illusions and say, "Heychal Hashem" (Temple of God)," Heychal Hashem", "Heychal Hashem" No, if you really mend your ways and your actions; if you execute justice between one party and another; if you do not oppress the stranger, the orphan, and the widow; if you do not shed the blood of the innocent in this place; if you do not follow other gods, to your own hurt— then only will I let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your ancestors for all time. See, you are relying on illusions that are of no avail. Will you steal and murder and commit adultery and swear falsely, and sacrifice to Baal, and follow other Gods whom you have not experienced, and then come and stand before Me in this House that bears My name and say, "We are safe"?— to do all these abhorrent things! Do you consider this House, which bears My name, to be a den of thieves?"

It is of course from Yirmiyahu⁷ that we also have the Haftorah on Tisha b'Av. Our Mesorah challenges us to read it in the depth of mourning; it powerfully, clearly and categorically sets out what Hashem is "looking for" and what it means to "know Hashem."⁸ Note also that this is not just applying these values amongst ourselves but is a universal instruction to us – "in the world":

"Thus says God: Let not the wise glory in their wisdom ;Let not the strong glory in their strength; Let not the rich glory in their riches. But only in this should one glory: Understand and know Me. For I God act with kindness, justice, and righteousness

(Chesed Mishpot and Tzedokoh) in the world; For in these I delight—declares God".

Hashem doesn't need to be fed with our sacrifices. He doesn't have His "mind changed" by our Prayers. Those are Pagan beliefs. Hashem lacks nothing and won't be bribed or nagged into submission but He does instruct us to follow an ethical path and create a society of social justice – Chesed Tzedokoh and Mishpot for that is to "understand and know Him" – in these "He delights". This underlies His Torah and the Mitzvos.

My Rosh Yeshiva (Yeshivat Har Etzion/ Gush) R'Yehuda Amital zt'l,⁹ spoke of his dismay that the fear of the outside world, had led to a conservative drive in the religious world, including the Religious Zionist community, to embrace halocho as the key component of Torah life – what chumrah must I take in kashrus, what extra aspect of the laws of Shabbes can I assume this year. He laments the deprioritisation or ignorance of the broad Torah values such as Vayikrah 19,2 (2) *"Speak to the whole Israelite community and say to them: You shall be holy, for I, your God, am holy"* and Devorim 6,18 *"Do what is right and good in the sight of Hashem"*. These are values which the Torah makes clear are requisites, underpinning that very religious life. Expressing the concern that a life focussed only on Halachic pilpul or the minutiae of ritual practice can miss the wood for the trees, even if it looks "frum".

To be clear, per R'Etshalom's quote above, there is, God forbid, no intent implied to countenance a non Halachic way of life, rather a recognition of the need to ensure that it is imbued with the values and meaning of the Torah.

Back to Yirmiyahu and "Heychal Hashem", note that the recipients of these messages given in front of the Beis Hamikdosh were the supposedly "frum" ones who bothered to attend. They may have been the "Shul goers" of their time¹⁰ but although physically present in the Temple confines, they were so blinded by the rite, the ceremonies, the tradition and the majesty of the building and everything associated with it, that they could not see that, without internalising the meaning, they were actors in or spectators of a superficial show. Are our Shul going and adherence to prescribed mitzvos any different if they are empty of

**“
Can we really pretend to be walking in Hashem's ways if we are not dealing with injustices and abuse in our own community, be it against women, children, the poor or “the other”? How can we claim that it is a proper representation of Chesed, Tzedokoh and Mishpot not to eg advocate for the Uyghurs or help the local homeless?”**

meaning? How do we expect Hashem to attribute deep value to our Shul services, our Communities, our "frum" way of life or our most dear State of Israel, if they are not ways to walk in the footsteps of our foremothers and fathers and seek to make the world a more Divine and therefore better place?

Avrohom's Descendants

Hashem chose Avrohom, as the Torah says because he would follow the way of Hashem¹¹: Hashem said, "Shall I hide from Avrohom what I am about to do, since Avrohom is to become a great and mighty nation and all the nations of the earth are to bless themselves by him? For I have chosen him that he may instruct his children and his household after him

6 7:3-11

7 9:22-23

8 See also the culmination of Rambam's Moreh Nevuchim 3:53.

9 From a Droshoh given at Kenes Lavi Sukkos 2005 (quoted in 125 of "Ever Be Human" 2024 Miskal – Yediot Acharonot Books and Chemed Books)

10 A point first made to me by my teacher Rav Menachem Liebtog

11 Bereishis 18:17-19

to keep the way of Hashem by pursuing righteousness (Tzedek) and justice (Mishpot)...” We learn this as Hashem is “in the process of deciding” whether Sodom and Amorah need to be destroyed¹², which He reveals to Avrohom, triggering him to argue with God(!) on behalf of Justice/Mishpot not to kill the innocent with the guilty. Hashem chooses Avrohom to initiate the Chosen People because his descendants are to follow in his moral footsteps, to be seekers of justice and righteousness and one day to create societies driven by those values to inspire others too.

So, when the prophet Amos warns the Northern Kingdom that they face destruction because of the corruption in their society and treatment of the weak, he specifically refers to the terminology of Avrohom’s choosing – Justice and Righteousness – (5,23–24 “Get away from Me the noise of your songs; I won’t listen to the tunes of your harps but rather let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever flowing stream” hoping to jolt them (and the reader) to reconsider paths they have chosen.

We are the “chosen people” as we are chosen to walk the path of Avrohom and the way of Hashem. We were taken out of Egypt for a purpose¹³. Making a kiddush Hashem to the World is a central tenet of Torah life. It is, of course, true that this is not always possible and so Yitzchak had to wait until he had re-opened the final well which Avrohom had dug before finally being at peace with his neighbours (and calling it Shalva) allowing him to “call out in Hashem’s name”; Yaakov’s plans to use Beis El as the basis for doing the same were thwarted by Shimon and Levi’s actions over Shechem which led to the family being hated by the locals; and Dovid Hamelech was not able to build the Beis Hamikdash in part because he was “a man of war”, as opposed to Shlomo, a man of peace. In each case however, the Tenach makes it quite clear that drive was nevertheless there to make a kiddush

Hashem, thereby spreading the concept of a universal, monotheistic, ethical God who made all of humanity in His image. For example, the book of Shmuel seems to go out of its way to emphasise that Dovid constantly looked to Hashem and that he also (ultimately) developed the moral sensitivity to deal compassionately with everyone – Jew and non Jew alike.¹⁴

The more one learns these sources, the more it becomes apparent that looking outward to a better world for all (not by conquest but through the example of ethical behaviour – in other words, per Zechariah 4:6 “This is the word of God to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by My spirit—said God of Hosts.”)¹⁵ is fundamental to our charge. Indeed the first Haftorah of the Torah reading cycle in Bereishis, containing the story of the creation of the whole world, is Yishayahu’s clarion call to be a “light unto the nations¹⁶”. The next Haftorah for Parshas Noach calls the flood “Noach’s flood”, which is understood by many as blaming the flood on that man of the Ark who, notwithstanding that he could see the ills of that generation and knew of the impending doom, kept to himself and his family, doing nothing to save the others. This brings us back around, closing the circle with the Parsha of Lech Lecho and Hashem’s call to Avrohom to go out and make the kiddush Hashem to the world and be a “blessing” to others.

Today

We are living through incredibly tough times with the type of urgent, moral questions which we have not had to face for thousands of years. We are now in a position to build ethical societies and communities both abroad, as well as, in the State of Israel. There are obviously competing values, self defence being a key one. We have just suffered the worst attacks since the Holocaust! However if we are not at least gearing our thoughts and prayers to that kiddush Hashem with which Hashem charged Avrohom and “his family after him” (or at the very least not to make a chilul Hashem), if we are not challenging ourselves and our leaders accordingly but rather getting lost in a

compassionless and inward looking spiral which allows us to hide behind hatred and a multiplicity of good reasons, not to reach for our *raison d’être*, then what are we doing?

Are we really internalising the Divine prophecies cited above from Amos, Yishayahu and Yirmiyahu who call out as an affront to Hashem the practice of rites and mitzvos without fulfilling their meaning and whilst not attempting to create a more just society? Can we really pretend to be walking in Hashem’s ways if we are e.g. neither looking to help the poor nor dealing with injustices and abuse in our own community or in Israel, be it against women, children, or “the other”? How can we claim that it is a proper representation of Chesed, Tzedek and Mishpot not to e.g. advocate for the Uyghurs or help the local homeless? How is a sole focus on our own tragedy in Israel without an attempt to alleviate the suffering of any innocent humans be they in Gaza, Yehudah, Shomron Ra’nana or London, following in the footsteps of Avrohom?

Over the Yomim Neroim we may well be shocking hard, singing loud, beating our chests, crying rivers of tears, depriving ourselves of food and frantically saying and chanting words and resolving to aspire for the next step in being “frum”. However consider what is this “religion” that we are trying to “sacrifice to” and what is the god that we are praying to. Without that goal of a kiddush Hashem in mind, an ethical drive, both inward and outward looking, it is clearly not the religion of the Torah which requires us to follow in the footsteps of Avrohom and our spiritual forbears who readily and courageously answered Hashem’s call with “Heneni” to assume the role of making the world a better and more ethical place by seeking opportunities to make a kiddush Hashem.

It’s hard and yes, really, really hard and at times so unfair because we are asked¹⁷ to hold ourselves up to a higher standard. We also continue to suffer from the oldest hatred. So we the Jews probably do have it harder than anyone else but who said it was supposed to be easy? After all, we are all a part of the Chosen People.¹⁸

Aren’t we? ■

A version of this article will be published on the Jewish Ethics Project website jewishethicsproject.org.

¹⁷ Albeit by God

¹⁸ I think that this is the natural and intended consequence of what the Rambam discusses in Moreh Nevuchim 3:24.

¹² Their sin being that their society did not help the poor and the needy (Yechezkel 16:14). Note also Yishiyahu’s reference to Am Yisroel being akin to Sodom and Amorah in his warning of destruction quoted above.

¹³ Contrast Amos 3:1–2 “You only have I known of all the families of the Earth,” referring to the expectation to act in accordance with our “chosen status” and “Are you not like the children of Ethiopians to Me, oh ‘Benei Yisroel, says Hashem. Did I not bring up Israel out of the Land of Egypt and the Philistines from Kaftor and Aram from Kir” in 9:7 when we don’t act accordingly – i.e. just one nation amongst any number of others who were moved from one geography to another. See also Da’at Mikrah/Amos Chacham on Amos p.9ff.

¹⁴ For example, in Shmuel II Dovid’s treatment of the Egyptian slave of the Amalakites, his potential rival Mepiboshes, son of Yehonasson or the Givonim.

¹⁵ Part of the Chanukah Haftorah aligning with Chazal’s focus on the spiritual victory rather than the physical victory in battle.

¹⁶ 42:5–7 “I created you and appointed you. A covenant people, a light of nations—, to open blinded eyes to bring prisoners from captivity and those who dwell in darkness from their prison”

MAGEN AVOT BOOK CLUB



The Magen Avot Book Club has gone from strength to strength to strength this year. New members have joined and have stimulated discussion in a relaxed atmosphere on a wide variety of books. Some of the most heated discussions concerned science fiction topics as we cover modern fiction in all its aspects.

Among those books read were:- *The Ministry of Time* by Kalliane Bradley, *Clear* by Carys Davies, *Project Hail Mary* by Andy Weir, *Three Floors Up* by Eshkol Nevo (and we watched an Italian film version of this Israeli novel) and most recently Elif Shafak's *There Are Rivers in the Sky*.

New members are welcome and can access the dedicated WhatsApp group from the QR code at the front of this magazine



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RECIPES

WE ARE DELIGHTED TO WELCOME BACK TA'AMIM AS OUR GUEST CHEFS
THIS ISSUE, WITH SEASONAL RECIPES INSPIRED BY THE SIMANIM

For more inspiring recipes for the Chagim, visit wearetaamim.com or follow @wearetaamim



Apple Cider & Honey Chicken



Rosh Hashanah invites us to begin the year not just with prayer, but with purpose, (and often, with a full plate). The *Simanim*, symbolic foods eaten at the start of the festive meal, transform our tables into spaces of spiritual expression. Rooted in ancient tradition and rich with meaning, each bite becomes a whispered hope, a spoken blessing, a gesture of connection that involves the body as much as the soul.

Across cultures and centuries, these meaningful morsels, apples dipped in honey, carrots, dates, leeks, pomegranates, have carried with them wordplay, ritual, and deep emotion. Some prayers are sweet, others solemn, but all serve as intentional offerings for the year ahead.

This three-course menu draws inspiration from the *Simanim*, weaving tradition into a modern culinary experience. While not a full *Simanim Seder*, the meal pays homage to its spirit: a ritual of reflection, joy, and renewal shared through food. Each course highlights key symbolic ingredients, paired thoughtfully with blessings that echo generations of Jewish longing and hope.

Whether you're familiar with these customs or encountering them anew, may this meal invite you to taste with mindfulness, speak with intention, and begin the year nourished – body, heart, and soul.

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LEEK AND CELERIAC SOUP



*Serving suggestion:
Finish with homemade
sourdough croutons.*

Photo by Ta'amim

Serves 6-8

Prep time: 5-10 mins | Cooking time: 1 hour

This is leek and potato soup's grown-up cousin—sweet, earthy, heady with garlic and perfect as the cooler Autumn weather draws in.

When we eat leek at the Rosh Hashana table, we ask Hashem, if it be His will, to cut off our enemies. As we begin a new year and reflect on the one that has been, this *Siman* is a pertinent one. At the time of writing, 50 hostages are still being held in Gaza, and a new ground offensive has begun. We pray that by the time this reaches you, the hostages will be home, and that in the year ahead, our enemies will be removed and we should see lasting peace.

INGREDIENTS:

- 4-5 Leeks (whites), *ribboned*
- Celeriac, *peeled and chunked*
- Onion, *quartered*
- Salt and Pepper
- 4 tbsp Olive Oil
- 4-6 cloves of Garlic
- Juice of one Lemon wedge

METHOD

- 1.** Preheat oven to 200°C (180°C Fan/400°F).
- 2.** Place the celeriac and onion in an ovenproof dish, and drizzle with 1½ tbsp oil, ¼ tsp salt and ¼ tsp pepper. Mix.
- 3.** In a piece of silver foil, place the garlic cloves and drizzle in ½ tbsp oil. Wrap the cloves and pop it into the dish with the celeriac and onion. Put into the oven for 45min-1hr until turning golden brown.
- 4.** Meanwhile, in a frying pan, add the remaining oil, leeks and a squeeze of lemon and fry low and slow, stirring regularly, until softened - approx 20-30mins.
- 5.** Transfer all the cooked ingredients including the onion into a soup pan - squeeze out the cloves of garlic which should by now be soft and caramelised.
- 6.** Pour in 6 cups of water, bring to the boil, then turn down to a simmer. Cover and cook for a further 45 mins to help combine the flavours and create a stock.
- 7.** Using a stick blender (or similar) blitz all the ingredients together, adding salt and pepper to taste, and loosening with a little more water if desired.
- 8.** *Optional:* Top with homemade garlicky sourdough croutons.

APPLE CIDER & HONEY CHICKEN

Serves 6-8

Prep time: 5-10 mins | Cooking time: 1 hour



Photo by Ta'amim

Perhaps the best known and most widely observed *Simanim* custom is that of dipping (or drizzling) apple in honey or sugar, an omen for a sweet and good year.

Our tribute to this custom is a riff on 'beer can chicken,' cooking the whole bird upright on a tinny of cider, as shown on the previous spread. The method involves regular basting, which keeps the meat beautifully moist as the outside crisps up and the onions and apples in the base of the pan slowly stew into a delicious gravy.

Serving suggestion:

Serve with roasted baby potatoes and green veg. Optionally, serve with roasted carrots, spinach and beets to tick off more of the *Simanim*.

INGREDIENTS:

- Whole Chicken
- 2-3 Onions, *ribboned*
- 6 Apples, *cored and cut into chunks*
- 1-2 tbsp Oil
- Salt and Pepper
- 4 cloves Garlic
- 1 can of Apple Cider
- 40g Margarine, *softened*
- 3 tbsp Honey
- 1½ tbsp Garlic powder

METHOD

1. Preheat oven to 180°C (360°F/ Gas Mark 4).
2. Ribbon your onions and sprinkle with ¼ tsp salt. Add them to an ovenproof casserole dish alongside the apples, whole cloves of garlic, 1-2 tbsp of oil and ½ tsp black pepper. Stir to combine, then drizzle over ⅓ of the can of cider.
3. Next make your marinade. Combine softened margarine with the garlic powder, honey, ¼ tsp black pepper and ⅓ of the cider and set aside.
4. Take the chicken and remove any butchers twine and any giblets that may be inside the cavity. Clear a space in the centre of your casserole dish and place the can of cider, (which should have about ⅓ left in it), in the centre of the dish. Place the chicken onto the can so that it is standing up in the dish (as pictured on the previous spread).
5. Take your marinade and generously spread it over the chicken, getting into the nooks and under the skin.
6. Place the chicken uncovered into the oven, checking and basting every 20 mins for 90 minutes, ensuring the chicken is cooked all the way through. The skin should be golden brown.
7. Remove the chicken carefully from the can, and place separately ready to carve. Pour the remainder of the cider into the casserole dish and heat through with the onion, apple, chicken schmaltz mixture, adding cornflour if desired to create a thickened gravy.
8. Served the carved chicken topped with the apple/onion mixture.

DATE, TAHINI & COCONUT ICE CREAM (PAREV)

Based on a
recipe by
Love and Lemons



Serves 6-8

Prep time: 5 mins | Freezing time: approx 12 hrs

Echoing the message of leeks, the 'Yehi Ratzon' we make over dates calls for our enemies to be vanquished.

This dessert is incredibly simple to make, containing just 3 ingredients. Tahini offsets the sweetness of the date syrup, with cool coconut serving as a palate cleanser, rounding off the meal with sophistication and a complex, well balanced mouthful, both sweet and refreshing.

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 can (400ml) Coconut Cream
- ¼ cup Tahini Paste
- ⅓ cup Silan Date Syrup

METHOD

1. Add all ingredients to a freezer-safe airtight container (or double walled freezer tub), and mix together with a whisk or stick blender until aerated. Seal the tub and place into freezer.
2. Stir after 4-6 hours then return to freezer until completely frozen.
3. Serve topped with lashings of silan, or pair with your favourite spiced honey cake.



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